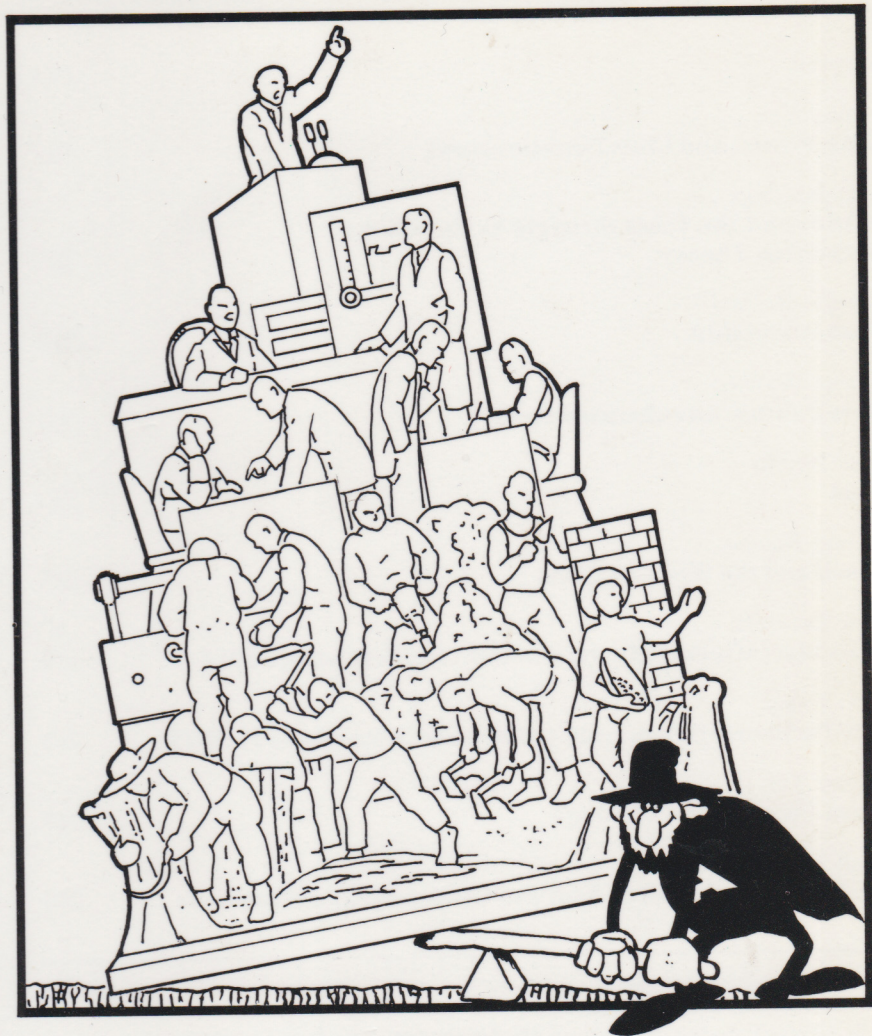


# THE RAVEN 11

ANARCHIST QUARTERLY



## on Class

CAMILLO BERNERI • KEITH FLETT • TOM JENNINGS  
BOB JONES • PETER NEVILLE • GARY PATTISON  
DONALD ROOUM • GEORGE WALFORD • JOHNNY YEN



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## Editorial

Who are the 'working class'? The lively contributions on the subject contained in the pages that follow, with the notable exception of Tom Jennings' essay, while not denying that we live in a class ridden society, are unable to pinpoint that elusive species: 'the working class'.

We have followed Tom Jennings' heady essay in which he presents a rosy picture of this new born 'class struggle', 'class conscious' anarchism, and the rediscovery 'of our own working class identity and the implications this has for our action and potential' with an alka seltzer in Berneri's *Worker Worship* written, it is true, some 56 years ago but not by a disillusioned old man (he was only 37 at the time) which may shock some, as it did when first published, but which others less blinded by worker worship can confirm with contemporary examples. Though he can be classified as an intellectual his short life was anything but that of the cloistered academic. Life as an exile from Italian fascism in the early thirties (when most governments in Europe were either fascist or admirers of Mussolini's corporate state) was hard and when he was not in prison he earned a living as a manual worker. *Worker Worship* was principally directed to the Communists who were building up a completely false picture of the 'working class' as the vanguard in the revolutionary struggle (until of course in 1936 in Spain where they were in a small minority they sided with the anti-Franco petty bourgeois in order to build up their influence and led the counter revolution which culminated in the May Days of 1937 in Barcelona. Berneri was one of their victims.)

As Jennings rightly points out, the Communists have dropped this image of the 'working class' and perhaps for the reasons he gives, that 'eruptions of working class anger and action all over Britain . . . are perceived as irrelevant or even reactionary' though we would suggest that it is because they can see that the worker-worship approach has proved negative in the Western world (confirmed furthermore by events in the Eastern bloc countries) where consumerism is the ideal and certainly the goal for the foreseeable future for manual workers no less than white collar workers, who are now anyway in a majority. According to research carried out on election trends it would appear that 60% of skilled workers (C2s in the advertising pundits'



categorisation) voted Tory at the last general elections. It is sad to see that some anarchists in the '90s are using the same worn out clichés used by the Communists in the '30s.

As anarchist propagandists we agree with George Walford's last paragraph in that we direct our propaganda to all who will listen to us — to all the working 'classes' as well as the non-working 'classes' young or old, rich or unemployed. The anarchist revolution will only be possible when there are enough convinced anarchists who want it.

Judging by the few letters and articles we receive for *The Raven* we must assume that the impression had been gained by readers that only commissioned articles would be published. This is certainly not the case. We are including in this issue the only contribution received following publication of Laslo Sekelj's article with the provocative title: *Has Anarcho-Communism a Future?* (in *Raven* 9) and that from a Trotskyist, albeit as Keith Flett puts it 'not of the official variety' (which of the 57?).

*Raven* 12 will be 'On Communicating'. There are hundreds of anarchist papers large and small published throughout the world. Books and pamphlets by the hundred of thousands are distributed by groups and individuals, by alternative bookshops, at book fairs and meetings year in year out. Yet to our knowledge there has never been an international gathering of representatives of anarchist publishing groups to discuss how effective is our work and how it could be made more effective; to discuss what we are writing about and what we should be writing about and how it can be put over most effectively. The minority press is today overwhelmed by the mass media — Press, TV, radio as never before. We shall be getting in touch with our comrades on the Continent in the hope that they will participate in this survey, and we invite *Raven* readers to send us their views for publication. In the course of the next few weeks we shall be raising these questions in *Freedom* and going into more details on the questions to which we have to seek answers in order to make our anarchist propaganda more effective, more wide reaching and more convincing.

Meantime we welcome comments and letters for publication on the questions raised in this issue of *The Raven* as well as in *Raven* 10 'On Education'.



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## Johnny Yen

### Class, Power and Class Consciousness An Anarchist Model

For many of us, the rationale for anarchism is expressed in terms of *class conflict* or *class war*. Class is traditionally an *economic* concept. For example, the marxist definition of class is based upon *relations to the means of production*. The bourgeoisie or capitalist class are that small minority who own productive capital (wealth that produces more wealth) or have the means to do so as individuals; in effect, they do not have to work (or claim benefits, grants etc) to live; they live off the *surplus value* (profit) of others' work.

As useful as this analysis is, it is simply not enough for anarchists; we need a model of class that can be applied to societies where *any* minority controls the means of production. The "ruling class" is not universally synonymous with the bourgeoisie; in most countries in Europe, social stratification is at least partially *politically* determined. It is through *control of resources* (factories, machinery, land etc) that this elite comprising the bourgeoisie (*personal* owners of capital) and politicians (who control capital by virtue of their *impersonal* role) *exploit the majority*. Thus the concept that allows us to bracket capitalism with state control is *power over resources*. Minority power over resources is built into the state system, since the state, by its nature, is an *institutionalised hierarchical power-structure*.

In fact, many marxist academics have recognised the need to include power in their concept of class (though few, unfortunately, have taken the analysis to its logical conclusion — anarchism). However, this new, more complex notion of class has led to anomalies in attempts to redefine *the working class*. For me, there is no problem with the idea that the capitalist class can never have the same interests as the working class (economic definition); the conflict between wages and profits is built into the system. But certain factors, including the growth of the service sector and the decline of productive industry in Britain and other countries has led many revolutionaries and academics to define the working class such that only a *small minority* are thus categorised. This seems to me to be comparable to an aspect of marxism which emphasises the revolutionary potential of productive industrial manual workers. I believe that, though political and economic indicators are essential in class analysis, *subjective class consciousness* must also be



considered. It is at least partly independent of these two and mediates between them and overt behaviour. In fact, I would regard it as a partial solution to the problems raised by revolutionary theories which place a heavy emphasis on economic and political factors.

### The Grey Area and Class Consciousness

Marx believed that the *industrial working class* were the key to the revolution. This contention is based on the idea that this group are the most likely to develop an acute awareness of the contradiction between their own economic interests and those of the capitalist class. The two main reasons for this are said to be the fact that these *productive workers* experience more *alienation* (because the products of their labours are owned by someone else) and the *physical proximity* to others with the same experience; this facilitates the development of revolutionary working class organisations (and/or trade unions).

I would argue that the reasons suggested for the non-appearance of the predicted revolution point to the problem with relying exclusively on this one group of workers. In Britain, at least, paid manual workers are now equalled if not outnumbered by non-manual workers. The jobs of these various middle classes are said to make it impossible for them to develop the same revolutionary class-consciousness as the productive manual workers, since most of them are 'non-productive'. Not only this, the fact that many members of this group get paid a lot of money under capitalism means that they are seen to have the *same interests* as the *capitalist* class.

To make matters worse for those who see the *majority* as oppressed and yet who rely on the industrial proletariat to be the engine of the revolution, the situation among manual workers is equally problematic. Many working class people (for example in the building trade) are well-paid and/or self-employed. (By well-paid I mean paid very much better than many white-collar workers, and better than the national mean average — £12,000 p.a.). Many more are employed in service industries or by the government and councils, and so cannot be alienated in the normal sense, since they too are non-productive. These groups now equal or outnumber productive manual workers.

There are further variables worthy of consideration, such as home ownership, savings, market position (qualifications etc) and so on. But instead of the two basic, implacably opposed classes, we now have a whole constellation of mildly conflicting interests. So instead of being the dynamic force of the revolution, many of the industrial proletariat frequently strive to maintain pay differentials with others in the exploited majority.



I believe that, because subjective class consciousness is an important independent variable, revolutionary working class solidarity can develop among *the large majority* of people who do not own or control the means of production. There are *many kinds of experience* that are conducive to revolutionary class-consciousness; that is, the realisation that the majority would be better off without a minority (exploiting them by) controlling resources.

Some examples to illustrate this. Marx insightfully concluded that the productive industrial working class would be highly receptive to revolutionary ideas. But if the sons and daughters of capitalists and non-manual workers are incapable of seeing the justice and necessity of a classless society, how is it that Marx and Engels themselves came to this conclusion, and worked to create the First International Working Men's Association? The same goes for Bakunin and Kropotkin, both of whom were upper class and yet sincere and influential revolutionaries.

To use a more contemporary example, it is reported that Andy Murphy of *Class War* is paid £14,000 a year (£2000 above the national average) for a white collar council job. *Class War's* own introductory pamphlet says that the interests of teachers, social workers, local government officers and students will never be the same as those of the (rest of the) working class. The point is this: a narrow definition of 'the working class' leads to anomalies, and must ultimately be counter-productive. We need to bear in mind our ability consciously to perceive ourselves; otherwise we may end up arguing (as some marxist academics do) that, because all class consciousness is determined by external factors, *all* perceptions are ideological. The fact that it is actually possible for us to recognise and see through our own ideologies (and those of others) means that we do not passively swallow the dominant ideology whole.

But what of the *police*? "Surely," it might be argued, "their *role* defines them as enemies of the genuine working class, irrelevant of their economic situation or their subjective class consciousness." This makes the important point that whether economic, political or subjective factors are most important can vary from occupation to occupation. But I would turn the objection on its head and argue that, while their role makes them our class enemies, to some extent their *class consciousness* (or lack of it, perhaps) *determines their role*. The police are necessarily the enemies of the oppressed majority unless they renounce their chosen roles. The same applies to other state functionaries such as the army, top civil servants, 'left wing' politicians etc. It is not true to say that *such people are inevitably the enemy*; as people, they have the power to see through and reject their roles. True, they are relatively unlikely to do so; but a person's receptiveness to revolutionary ideas is only a



matter of degree; armies have been known to desert, for example. Some people may be ready for anarchism now, some later, while others may never be ready. It is worth remembering that, in order to make a living, virtually all of us further the aims of government and capital in some small way (eg. in giving profit to capitalists, or simply by being unemployed and functioning to bring down inflation); therefore it must be wrong to assert that class consciousness is *inevitably fixed* in some way. It is influenced by economic and political factors; that is undeniable; but it is *always possible to change*.

### **Anarchism and the Function of the Working Class in the Revolution**

I would hope that most anarchists agree with me that the working class are (with certain notable exceptions, the police being the primary example) *those that do not own or control productive capital*, and hence *have to work* (or claim benefit etc.) *to live*; this group certainly constitutes the vast majority in all societies. In arguing that we need to include both economic and political indicators in our definition of class, and that class consciousness must be seen as partly independent of both of these factors, I am obviously implying that the concept of class is useful to anarchists; because it is *useful to the oppressed majority*. *The aim of anarchists must surely be to encourage members of the oppressed majority to take the initiative and to recognise their common interests and collective strength* (in organisation, decision-making etc.), and actively to support people engaged in conflicts where battle lines are clearly drawn according to class.

Certain Marxist groups are usually criticised by anarchists because they stand around selling the party paper at strikes instead of supporting the working class directly. I would argue that, although the ultimate aim of many of these groups is to *control* the working class, attempting to draw people's attention to links between the industrial dispute they are involved in and others paralleling them (i.e. *raising class consciousness*) is an excellent strategy. To identify a common pattern means to identify the common class enemy; awareness of group (class) membership in the context of the existence of another group (class) can lead to increased intergroup (class) competition and a more *conscious effort* to see the ingroup (working class) doing better than the outgroup (dominant elite). Recognition of the injustice of the state and capitalism and of the united power of the working class majority can thus lead to increased anger, determination and confidence in working class organisation. The defeat of exploitation, racism and sexism, and the development of solidarity and co-operation necessitate people



recognising their *shared identity* and *acting upon it*, instead of acting solely as individuals or subgroups. The concept 'working class' in the way I've defined it allows us to do this; it is the social category that best describes the objective economic and political position of the majority of the world, and clearly differentiates them from the exploiting minority.

There are many other ways in which the objective aspects of social class can be made salient and to raise revolutionary working class consciousness than simply by selling papers. Anarchist strategies seem to me to span a continuum that stretches from 'evolutionary' approaches such as those practiced by Colin Ward and described by George Woodcock, to much more immediate action such as that advocated by *Class War*. I see no contradiction in these two; in fact, I see the range of anarchist methods of revolution as complementing each other.

Spontaneous uprisings, wildcat strikes, riots and so on have a two-fold function. First, they develop the attitudes of those taking part; if they are not conscious anarchists, they might see clearly for the first time the true nature of the state and the police. For those taking part already committed to anarchism, such events boost confidence in autonomous organisation and resistance, dispelling still further the fatalistic idea that the state is an invincible monolith. Second, those not taking part, if they are anarchists, may be heartened by the unwillingness of others in their class to tolerate oppression; it is important for us to be aware of our heritage of rebellion (this is no doubt why Thatcher is trying to throw social history off the school curriculum); this gives us confidence and enthusiasm for the class struggle. Those not taking part who are not anarchists may be influenced indirectly, in the same way that they might be by graffiti, publicity stunts and so on; this may be the only opportunity many people have to hear of the existence of the body of ideas that make up anarchism. I do not accept that people will *necessarily* be put off by negative images. If someone has never heard of anarchism before, the very awareness of its existence may cause them to ask why it is that some people think we can do without the state. They may be prompted to look deeper, or they may simply have their rosy view of the state and capitalism shaken; even if by only a small amount, it is still a start.

In the middle of the spectrum of anarchist revolutionary activity are single-issue campaign organisations, like the local anti poll tax groups. These examples of mutual aid can function to demonstrate the collective power of the working class without leadership, and thus promote confidence in the class and in non-authoritarian social structures. This is the case even if people do not call themselves



anarchists; it is to be hoped, however, that many will recognise anarchism as the one perspective that is best suited to this way of thinking, and will consciously extend their principles beyond the single issue.

At the far end of the spectrum, there are self-build housing schemes, anarchist schools, anarchist publishers, and certain co-ops which are non-hierarchical though not explicitly anarchist. These groups may also bring to people's attention a non-statist, non-capitalist conception of society; and, importantly, they provide a *working model* of the type of social organisation that anarchists at all points on the continuum are advocating; they demonstrate how an anarchist society will function, and serve as the beginnings of the infrastructure of such a society.

The ultimate value of all types of direct and indirect propaganda and praxis is that they help to develop an *anarchist counter-culture*. The counter-culture is the foundation for a society where anarchist assumptions (e.g. heterarchy, co-operation, communism) replace statist and bourgeois values (e.g. hierarchy, competition, private property). The rationale behind anarchism is that the working class majority themselves are the best judges of their own needs. This is and must be a conscious anarchist assumption; it must be based on an awareness of the conflicting interests between a minority who do and a majority who do not control the means of production, *and* on an understanding that organisation does not need to be top down.

Anarchism as a whole might be characterised as a two-pronged attack. The developing counter-culture fosters values justifying propaganda by deed and active defence of working class communities (as in Scotland where whole streets have organised to thwart the bailiffs). By becoming more aware of their common interests in situations of overt conflict, working class people may be introduced to a counter-culture based on the one 'political' perspective that supports the working class *directly* — anarchism. Thus the overthrow of the government and the destruction of capitalism, if and when they come, will not be an *end* in themselves, but a *means*; they will be a direct reflection of a widespread anarchist counter-culture; a symptom more than a cause of a revolution which is totally *bottom-up*.



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## Tom Jennings

# Politics and Class Struggle in the 1990s: Libertarian Theory

### Introduction

From the mid-1970s to the present we have witnessed the most dramatic ever erosions of income, welfare provision, housing conditions, rights, workplace protection, hopes and expectations of ordinary British people. Yet it is possible for the idea that 'class' no longer exists, or is no longer significant, to gain ground and approval. Eruptions of working class anger and action all over Britain during this time are perceived as irrelevant or even reactionary, not just by the apostles of the New Right, but within the Communist Party, wider sections of the trendy left, trade union bureaucrats and welfare state professionals, and in the pages of many alternative political journals. Meanwhile, working class, and class-conscious, anarchism is undergoing rapid growth and diversification across England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The causes and consequences of this apparent contradiction are one thing, but what is certain is that class struggle anarchism is generating many agendas, priorities, debates, organisational experiments and above all, *action*.

This essay isn't intended to be representative of these developments, nor to justify or explain them. It does illustrate some theoretical preoccupations of some of the people involved, as well as perhaps offering original, modern perspectives on politics, society and anarchism to set against the image of class theory offered by its opponents.

### I Perspectives

The libertarian left, and the left as a whole, has languished in ideological crisis for years. Theorists have hardly moved beyond a conception of socio-economic class which may have had relevance earlier this century but which cannot address the complexities of late capitalism and the nature of the State. The fragmentation and recomposition of classes over forty years, without theoretical development doing justice to these changes, renders us hamstrung in



our analysis of contemporary society. Insights into the direction of the class struggle, let alone revolutionary possibilities, elude our grasp. Small wonder that we are seen as dreamers. What we are left with is a conviction as strong as ever that the working class is the only hope. But since we cannot define what the working class now is, our gut identification with its struggle flounders when it comes to a concrete political analysis.

At least we've left behind the legacy of the 1960s. Issues which became problematic then are still issues for us now, but in organisational terms people who lose sight of the central importance of an analysis of class and capitalism will not be part of our discussion and development. We have rediscovered our own working class identity and the implications this has for our action and potential. Political regeneration needs to follow.

The influence of class struggle on libertarian ideas is growing, based as always in the activity of working class people, but more than that backed up with deliberately formulated and expressed political ideas permeating working class struggle. Among younger people a sense of working class purpose and a 'cultural libertarianism' are visible in a way unheard of in Britain. This combination is already producing tangible organisational advances in terms of the number of class struggle anarchist groups around the country. These are generating propaganda which can appeal to working class people as a whole as well as those with some existing political consciousness, and turn young working class people away from lifestyle politics (whether or not individuals are 'green', anti-nuclear or vegetarian, these attributes are not seen as the main carriers of political thought or action).

Among the areas we need to tackle in order for the sophistication of our analysis to catch up with the strength and depth of our emotional investment in the class struggle is the relationship between oppressions based on class, race and gender. Anarchism has always implied a sensitivity to power as well as some kind of economic analysis, but has always failed to transform that sensitivity into a materialist analysis. Therefore the charge of 'romantic idealism' levelled against us is justified. Until we can find theoretical ground which allows us to analyse power within the same framework as economics, our politics will remain romantic (or will take refuge in 19th century class struggle theory). Recent theoretical work suggests how to solve this problem.<sup>1</sup>

The exercise of power generates practices and discourses rather than just being associated with them; the material of our bodies, rather than bourgeois notions of the self or ego, provides the background on which

1. eg. Foucault, Timpanaro, Althusser, Peter Fuller.



historical forces operate. According to such analysis, subjectivity is a crucial site of political action, mediating both the exercise of power itself and the reproduction of power relations (including the economic). Most of classical anarchist theory is a branch of liberal individualism; seeing rational, conscious, autonomous subjectivity as a source of action. But subjectivity is a fragmented and largely unconscious process, formed in ways we can barely glimpse using common-sense rationalist discourse. Active collective struggle intensifies when a shift in the use of available discourse occurs — if a different subject position in a discourse, or a new discourse altogether, is chosen. Such a shift is usually more to do with collective emotional responses to events rather than conscious rational debate. But what matters is the availability and appropriateness of alternative discourses, and subject positions within them, when the crunch comes. That is what our political practice is for.

This comprehensive approach to power and social change implies that marxist and anarchist formulations suffer from serious flaws. The tradition of anarchist communism has always left space for a different conceptualisation of action, so we may be able to weave a more sophisticated analysis of power and historical change than Bakunin's optimistic and frankly childish voluntarism. Furthermore the marxist tradition leaves little room for such a shift of emphasis — since most of the 'scientific' laws of marxism would become uncertain. On the one hand this explains why orthodox marxism has been unable to adapt to such 'revolutionary' ideas; on the other hand the conceptual structure exists for us to extend our ideology substantially, even if we have as yet made few moves to do so.

For example, we might theorise oppression via a different analysis of institutions. In our normal conceptualisation of society it is through institutions that we imagine the effects of Capital and the State to be visible. Oppression involves a consistent benefit accruing to one group of people at the expense of another group. We have to look at how the discourses and practices implicated in that oppression produce the experience and behaviour (or the range of possible experiences and behaviours) associated with it. Since people are to some extent constituted by their experience and behaviour, different forms of oppression produce people in different ways, and should not be seen as varieties of the same thing — some effects are shared, but this does not imply a shared cause. There is a correlation in the ways capitalism has exploited racism and sexism, but this says more about capitalism than racism and sexism. Subjects of oppression treat the victims (objects) as non-human, reproducing the power relationship involved. But what of its origins, historical operation, social interests served or prospects for change?



A way of avoiding anxiety when acknowledging the seriousness of racism and sexism is to assert that struggles of women and black people are part of the class struggle: those who disagree are accused of middle class guilt-tripping. However this is a traditional liberal method of legitimating oppression — by perceiving it as something else. Another way of simplifying things is the idea that racism and sexism are only important insofar as they affect the class struggle. But racism and sexism would be quite capable of emerging after the destruction of capitalism. Deeper analysis is necessary if our pretensions of ever offering a theory and practice of revolutionary communism are to be believable. In Part II I try to mark out the boundaries of such an analysis.

All this has implications for diverse areas of our critique of society and our analysis of future possibilities. Part III includes a speculative re-appraisal of the concepts of class, power and identity, and a description of individual and collective development which sidesteps bourgeois individualism in its view of subjecthood and agency.

## II Class, Race, Gender<sup>2</sup>

Concepts like 'patriarchy' and 'institutional racism' are descriptions of other faces of the state/capitalism network of power: and are used uncritically to some extent. Prioritising equally struggles of race, gender and class looks like a warmed-over new left 'catalogue of oppressions'. If our conception of the revolution overthrowing class society is the most important part of our analysis what is the role of the fights against sexism and racism? If racism and sexism are institutional (and that's the main problem with them) then why won't the revolution which abolishes class (by abolishing the institutions of class society) also abolish sexism and racism? Analysis so far available can't solve this problem.

Working class struggle against capitalism is a force capable of dismantling the structure of capitalist society. The interests of working class women and working class black people are also to fight and defeat capitalism. But the interests of sections of the working class are not necessarily identical. All working class people may share long term interests (whether they know it or not), but that's not all there is to it.

What is it about society that will be changed by doing away with capitalism? 'Capitalism' is not 'society' — the institutions of society are not exactly the same as the institutions of capitalism. Furthermore, an

2. a version of part II appeared in an internal publication of the Anarchist Communist Federation.



institution does not just consist of the overt, structural, codified relationships that reflect its operation (ie. not just the positive power exerted by the agents of the institution); it consists also of the acquiescence, passivity and activity of the institution's 'objects' as well as the behaviour of its 'subjects'. For example, the institution of the police includes citizens' law-abidingness and anti-police behaviour as well as the strategies and actions of the police themselves. Or, the welfare state would be a very different institution if it wasn't for the sheep-like behaviour often to be observed in its objects. The picture of individuals and collectivities that emerges from this is that we are, to an extent, made up of our relationships with institutions ( . . . the bit relating to the mother + the bit relating to the family + the bit relating to school + the bit relating to economic power + all the other bits + their interactions etc.). Now the point of this is that institutional power relationships produce not only the desired conduct (from the rulers' point of view) but also, crucially, produce resistance — so that capitalism's social relations themselves generate working class opposition. Our struggle does not emerge magically from ideas — but from the interaction between capitalism's effect on people and what we can call, for want of a better word, human nature. And this may or may not be mediated by consciousness or ideology.

The revolution will destroy the institutions of capitalism — in the old sense of the term 'institution'. I am saying that the revolution will suspend, temporarily at least, only one side of the institutions of capitalism — that is the structural manifestations of those institutions — the laws, the agencies and the positive power of capitalism. The subjects of capitalism (who 'do' capitalism) will be out of action. And nothing is possible unless this happens. But the objects of capitalism (who capitalism is 'done to') remain — made up partly out of capitalism's social relations.

No power relation can work unless there are at least two parties to it — a subject (in control, with the power to achieve private goals at the other's expense) and an object (lacking control, having to move within constraints set by the subject). What happens when one side of a power relation is absent is that the other tries to create a counterpart — a subject looks for an object (ever seen a bureaucrat in search of lackeys, or an entrepreneur after consumers to exploit?). Also there is a strong tendency for the object of a power relationship, being made up partly out of the experiences of being an object, will search for a subject when one is not present. In looking for certainty in an uncertain world people can produce from among themselves whatever fits their previous experience — even when an appropriate outside agency is not available. We are unavoidably deeply formed and influenced by the social



relations of capitalism, sexism and racism — so what will stop the working class from re-creating capitalism, or some other form of hierarchical and exploitative society, after revolution?

Since we believe that something has to be put in the place of the positive power of capitalism, once the latter is broken, we encourage the tradition, the ideas and practices of libertarian relations. Of course it has always been part of the working class and of societies before capitalism. But we cannot rely upon this particular part of our human heritage coming single-mindedly and consistently to the fore in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods, unless there is some damn good reason for things to go in that direction. And part of the reason why a strong, influential libertarian movement is necessary is to try to increase the chances that the institutions produced after the revolution exert their power by and upon everyone. A situation where the subjects of institutions are the very same people as the objects of those institutions is only possible in a successful libertarian society. Otherwise bureaucracies and hierarchies would inevitably form, so that different groups of people would be placed once again in different relationships with the institutions — meaning the return of class or caste structure of some kind.

The influence of libertarian ideas and practices before the revolution and the libertarian content of organisation afterwards will hinder the direct return of exploitative economic and social relations. The strength of the voices and action of the working class movements of women and black people will determine how quickly racist and sexist patterns die out — a death also prepared for before the revolution, and potentially achievable afterwards.

Studying the growth of capitalism shows that things are more complex still. As a particularly vigorous and vicious set of power relations, capitalism was built from a productive combination of 18th century religion, state power, racism and sexism, welded with the new instrumental ideologies of bourgeois individualism and science. This implies that racist and sexist patterns and the process of objectification at the heart of capitalist social relations are much more thoroughly woven together than we might think. It certainly isn't the case that capitalism simply invaded ground previously held by other forms of domination, then used them to further its own interests, and finally absorbed them into itself. That could only be true if capitalism was ever, in practice, separate from sexism and racism — and it never was. No, capitalism's social relations and form of domination always depended upon, right from the start, the prevailing power relations within and between societies. If racist, sexist and other objectifying social practices helped generate capitalism once, how can we be sure



they won't again facilitate our enslavement? The answer is by tackling the power relationship inherent in the social relations and practices — the institutions of sexism and racism — that are as strong now as ever (even if they've never been independent from economic and State power). They form us as individuals and groups just as thoroughly as ever, and they could quite easily emerge from our darker sides again — even if the external material conditions now maintaining and producing them were to be disposed of.

The task is to change both terms of all power relationships — subjecthood and objecthood; to sweep away existing social structure; to transform the productive capacity of working class people to produce power relationships that diverge from preceding ones. Revolution deals with existing structures. The depth of preparation for full libertarian practice can hope to achieve a society where subjecthood and objecthood are not arbitrary, fixed and unequal. Our political analysis, tactics and strategy need to take both sides of the problem of power into account. This makes it necessary to find a new solution to the question of the relationships between class, race and gender.

We can work towards the specific event(s) of social revolution as a political goal and we are anti-racist and anti-sexist because we realise that racist and sexist patterns ruin movement towards libertarian practice, and would be particularly dangerous after a social revolution. Racism and sexism could sabotage the revolution 'from within' in the same way that they oppress and divide us now. There is no specific timescale of events which will abolish racism and sexism; we have to do all in our power to participate in and encourage the working class movements of women and black people — so that before, during and after the revolution those movements are strong enough to resist those exploitative, authoritarian power relations which the wider working class movement may not be in the best position to deal with.

That is why we prioritise equally struggles of class, race and gender, and why we need to work towards an analysis which does not parachute racism and sexism into capitalism; and doesn't merely add them to it. Working class women's struggles *as* working class women (not simply as working class people or as women) and working class black people's struggles *as* working class black people (not simply as working class people or as black people) can give us the inspiration and understanding to develop our analysis accordingly.



### III Class, Identity and Action

The concept of 'class' used by socialists, marxists and anarchists has never really encapsulated the realities of life for working class people. The development of modern capitalist society in the second half of this century has led to striking changes in the conditions of existence of many people, such that the criterion of selling one's labour in order to gain the necessities of life cannot itself be used to distinguish between top managers and bureaucrats, on the one hand, and unskilled factory workers or unemployed youth on the other. Patchwork arguments over the boundaries of the 'new middle classes' or the 'professional managerial classes', have been employed to breathe new life into crude materialism — where money, and an extremely impoverished vision of the material conditions of human existence, are the only really objective historical phenomena. Clear testimony to the shortcomings of this view of class was the 1970s spectacle of middle class trotskyists getting jobs in factories after finishing their degrees, hence becoming 'working class'. Likewise, working class kids can do well at school, progress up the meritocracy, and become 'middle class' (or from spiv to magnate, by a more risky route). How ironic that the convergence between marxist and individualist discourse should be so clearly revealed in the age of consumer choice and lifestyle voluntarism.

So, the inadequacies of class theory are painfully clear. Two things, at least, are missing. The first is an account of human 'nature' doing justice to lived experience and its complexity. It is striking that the two most common perceptions of the psychology of 'the masses' have barely changed from the early nineteenth century up till now. On the one hand we have the respectable, hardworking (cloth-capped) worker who takes pride in (and defines *himself* by) a trade and its tools — as in Marx, and all reactionary views of 'the decent, common folk'. On the other hand there is the mob animal, with barely suppressed primitive urges who is ever liable to explode into destructive violence with no care as to the consequences — thus requiring the utmost vigilance and policing on the part of those deemed to be 'responsible'. This is the vision of Bakunin (although he attributed different values to those qualities!) as well as all authoritarians and their apologists. Conservatives wish to herd the animal, liberals to reform and educate it, social democrats to hope it will disappear off its own bat, populists pretend the animal resides somewhere else, Leninists believe it must be suppressed so that better instincts can emerge, rationalists want to abolish it via the triumph of 'reason'. A spectrum of ideology founded upon twin illusions.

And what sustains the myth? The second lack concerns the means by



which the power relations and social and economic structures implied by these rhetorics are perpetuated, reproduced and transformed. What are the materials of power? Money, to be sure, but also the direct, physical effects of power through techniques, instructions, rules, disciplines, *discourses*. Whatever the economic interests of the more powerful sections of society, the means must exist for the wish to exercise power to be translated into physical effect. Furthermore, particular combinations of currently existing instrumental knowledge and techniques (manifested in writing, electronically or, less easily controllably, in spoken language) must be capable of being altered slightly so as to lead to the desired effects being visualisable. Only when articulated in discourse, deriving from extant discourse, can new power be exerted. This places considerable restrictions on how rampantly power interests can force their desires on everyone else. As far as modern capitalism is concerned, there seems no conceivable means of escape from the cycle of crises and convulsions that presently has the globe spiralling blindly towards disaster. One of the reasons is that short-term, private gain always has more influence than long-term planning — and capitalist systems are incapable of the latter anyway — witness Eastern Europe at the moment on both counts. Capitalism (including the 'State' variety) is trapped within its own discourse; the entire world view and its role in forming and shaping society would collapse if the orthodox, scientific instrumentality of Western bourgeois thought was questioned as the practical basis for 'business as usual'.

The implications for the class structure of modern society and the significance of the working class are considerable. Class status isn't determined just on economic criteria, though income etc. is clearly still central. The history of individuals' / families' / communities' immersion in specific power relationships, including interaction with various institutions and social forces will be highly salient. Only some of these directly concern economic factors, all will revolve around the use and effectiveness of discourse. Because discourses operate as power relationships through the subject and object positions available within them (see part II), the manner of their employment by working class people as objects, or maybe as subjects, will be critical in terms of what can happen next. Three related variables of class status can be described. Firstly, personal / collective history can vary to the extent that consistent experiences of physical / discursive subjection or subjecthood strongly influence our subsequent potential for positioning ourselves in newly-encountered discourses. For example, if as children we were regularly confronted with refusals from our parents of time, attention and material possessions (as working class children tend inevitably to be), then we will relate to the middle class rhetoric of



parenting (eg. every household situation should be turned into an educational experience) in ways different to children whose parents have such time, energy and money to spare. This discourse of parenting has serious effects on both working class parents and children (and different effects on middle class parents and children) since the parents are defined as reactionary and anti-progressive (whereas in fact they simply don't have the time etc.) — they are pathologised — and the children risk being labelled at school since they don't relate to teachers and the 'learning environment' in the ways desired by child-centred pedagogy (i.e. in the ways that middle class children do). Hence they don't tend to 'perform' so well, and this is defined as the parents', or home background's fault. Working class children are placed in a double bind here, because if they do well at school, it is likely to mean that they become progressively distanced from those they love (family, friends etc.). This persists throughout their education and afterwards. Middle class kids who do well are fitting the expected and sanctioned progress that the education system and their families desire, expect and understand. I hope this small example provides a glimpse of how discourses influence the constitution of our subjectivity — as far as the regulation and monitoring of parents and children are concerned, many interconnecting discourses combine with the material conditions of working class life to produce quite marked differences from middle or upper class people.<sup>3</sup>

The second variable is similar to the conventional definitions of class — income, work and material wealth, socio-economic status. But this too is more complex than many treatments of the subject imply. For example, *potential* future status must be included in a practical definition of class, since this will affect behaviour. Someone whose wealthy relatives provide a safeguard against bad times, or whose background of social skills and education mean that they can, at some point, choose to pursue more rewarding employment, cannot be equated to most of us who lack those options. And of course the ability and experience in taking part in and using middle class discourses can have important effects on the success with which we negotiate and deal with employers, government agencies and the agents of other institutions. This ability and experience will depend on background and current position to a large extent.

The third, and more elusive and subtle variable is *consciousness*. In any given situation there will be a number of attributions of meaning

3. A thorough and fascinating analysis of these matters can be found in the work of Valerie Walkerdine: eg. *Counting Girls Out* Virago, 1989; V. Walkerdine and H. Lucey *Democracy in the Kitchen* Virago 1989.



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and value that can be used to interpret and decide on what stance and action to take. There will be a number of available discourses, and subject positions within them, relating to whether one's position at work is as a dedicated professional, for example, or as a member of a workforce which gains scant reward for boosting someone else's profits and power. This aspect of class seems more difficult to grasp because it is such a collective phenomenon — and our usual talk of individuals misses the point by a long way. Meaning is given to thought and its consequent behaviour *socially*, whether this be by our immediate social environment, or in the development of our subjectivity through a history of discourse and action. So whatever our idiosyncratic, pet theories are about the nature of the universe, in practice what matters is the collective ability or tendency to position ourselves in a group in such a way as to make certain kinds of group behaviour more likely. Now middle class people have much less experience at seeing themselves and their situation in any collective way at all — because the whole purpose, logic, sense and structure of middle class discourse denies large scale social difference and simultaneously elevates the rational, consistent, self-conscious autonomous individual who makes voluntary decisions and choices. But working class people have a much harder task swallowing this rhetoric, since from an early age we have seen and felt a commonality of interest, in lives dominated by lack, necessity, overwhelming and intransigent public forces. Even in working class families where income and lifestyle have become less uncomfortable, there is still a strong sense of lack of choice, time, opportunity and wherewithal to live differently, and a concurrent hazy (at least) awareness of who benefits, whose interests are being served, *where power lies*. Whereas middle class attitudes revolve far more around how to get on individually, because it is in fact much more possible for middle class people to change their situation without it needing others to combine to that end. A major reason why middle class wage slaves rarely behave in the same ways as working class wage slaves is that the discourses of middle class work concern the commitment of one's life to a profession which suits the individual's capabilities and desires (finding one's own level etc.). Combined with the lack of experience and ability to view the world, and behave, socially, middle class people are far more likely to react in terms of their perceived, individual, career aims — not conducive, to say the least, to the development of collective action. And the significance of this for large-scale political possibilities is that we *know* that working class people are still capable of mobilising en masse and generating new practical, organisational and socially advanced forms of action that directly threaten the status quo. This capability is present because whatever the mystifications of



consumer capitalism, the reservoir of anger, resentment, desire for better lives and awareness (at some level) that we are in the same boat as others like us, is bubbling away as strongly as it ever has. The contents of the reservoir have changed considerably — for example a rejection of the meritocratic dream is spreading among young people, and a more subtle appreciation of the nature of our subjection at the hands of social institutions is beginning to polarise attitudes to education, social workers, councillors etc. Of course revolution isn't imminent, and the actions we can take to bring it nearer are as complex and fraught as ever. But we know now (from developments in the political parties, trade unions, 'progressive' educationists, the trendy left etc.) that we cannot trust middle class people to retain any real sense of what our interests and desires might be, because they will sooner or later (even given the best will) succumb to the temptation to prioritise their, *different*, world views, interests, discourses and practices — and having prioritised these will come to deny ours, and probably ignore us altogether. We are left to rely on our own resources, and this might be no bad thing, since these were by far the most potent agents of possible change all along.

A noticeable implication is that it is no longer possible according to the foregoing to identify class status on 'objective' measures alone. Since no attempt is being made to offer a 'scientific' view this need not be a problem. More importantly, the significance of 'class' is what effects it has on our political theory and practice. We can say that the probability of groups of people moving in libertarian, collective directions is greater if their backgrounds, present position and consciousness enables them readily to employ the discourses appropriate to those directions. And the purpose of our action as class struggle anarchists is not to be 'right', but to express our ideas in ways that increase the likelihood of movement in those directions. I would say that this is the common thread of current class-conscious libertarian thought and activity in Britain — and personally I find it a great relief that in my political activity I no longer have to expend vast quantities of time and energy pandering to the sensitivities of middle class people who, in any case, only ever seemed to view me and my kind with patronising condescension, or, at worst, contempt.



## Camillo Berneri

### Worker Worship

While reading Carlo Rosselli's\* book, *Socialisme Liberal* (Paris, 1930) I marked this passage (and I translate):

A pessimistic view of the masses implies in reality a pessimistic view of man since the masses are really no more than the sum of concrete individuals. If the masses are declared to be incapable of grasping the value of a struggle for liberty, even in just a crude and primitive way, then by the same token man himself is declared to be closed to every instinct which is not strictly utilitarian. Every dream of social redemption is cut off at the roots, and faith in democratic instincts is suffocated; that faith founded on the concept of a basic identity between human beings and a rational optimism regarding human nature.

I have never accepted without question certain Nietzschean attitudes on the part of certain individualists destined to finish up as secretaries in the *Camere di Lavoro* (Employment Exchanges) or worse, but, equally, I have never licked the boots of an 'aware and evolved' proletariat, not even in meetings. And I don't understand the courtly language used by the communist high priests. In an article (I cite one among thousands) from *Azione Antifascista*, June, 1933, I read that Gramsci is a 'proletarian spirit'. Where have I heard that expression before? I search my memory. Ah, I remember! It was at Le Pecq when, dressed in my bricklayer's labourer's clothes, I was surprised by one of the communist overseers. 'Now, Berneri, you will know what is the proletarian spirit!' Thus did he address me. Between a sifting of sand and two pails of ballast I reflected on the 'proletarian spirit'. And as always memories from the heart arose to help me clarify the problem. My first contacts with the proletariat: this was where I searched for the material which would provide me with a definition. I didn't find the 'proletarian spirit'. I re-found my old companions: young socialists of Reggio-Emilia and the surrounding areas. They were generous of heart, open of mind, tenacious of will. Then I got to know the anarchists.

*l'Operaiolatria* was first published as a pamphlet in Brest (France) in 1934. It was reprinted in Italy in 1972 and the most recent edition was issued in 1987 by the Archivio Famiglia Berneri (Pistoia). This edition was used for this, the first translation into English, by Gillian Fleming and Vernon Richards. See *Glossary of Names* at the end for a brief biography of the author.



Torquato Gobbi was my teacher; those misty evenings along the via Emilia, under the porticos which echoed with my efforts to resist his quiet arguments. He was a bookbinder, I a student at the *lyceo*, still 'daddy's boy' and ignorant, therefore, of the real, big university of life. And after that, how many workers in my daily life! But if in one I found a tinder to spark off my own thoughts, if in another I discovered elective affinities, if to another still I could be open and intimate as with a brother, how many other arid ones I found, how many jarred upon me with their conceited vacuities, how many sickened me with their cynicism! The proletariat was 'the people': that semi-bourgeoisie in whose world I had lived, the student world in which I lived; in a word, the *crowd*. And the more intellectual and spontaneous of my worker companions never spoke to me of 'proletarian spirit'.

It was from them themselves that I learned how slowly socialist propaganda and organisation advanced. Then where I was involved with that propaganda and organisation I *saw* the proletariat, which seemed to me, in general, how it still seems today, an enormous force which is ignorant of itself; which takes care of its interests in an unintelligent way; which fights only with reluctance for idealistic motives or long-term ends, which is weighed down by an infinite number of prejudices and crude ignorance and infantile illusions. The function of élites seemed clear to me: to set the example of boldness, of self-sacrifice, of tenacity; recall the masses to themselves on the question of political oppression and economic exploitation, but also on that of the moral and intellectual inferiority of majorities. So that to paint the bourgeoisie and proletariat with the brush of a simplistic demagoguery as portrayed in the caricatures in the Socialist *Avanti!* and the orators of political meetings seemed to me to be in bad taste and harmful.

There was, and unfortunately still is, a socialist rhetoric which is terribly non-educative. The communists contribute, more than any other avant-garde party, towards perpetuating it. Not content with the 'proletarian spirit' they have come up with 'proletarian culture'. When Lunaciarsky\* died some communist newspapers said that 'he incarnated proletarian culture'. Just how a scholarly writer of bourgeois origin (and erudition is culture's capitalism) could represent 'proletarian culture' is as much of a mystery as 'Marxist gynaecology' — a term which scandalised even Stalin. The anarchist journal *Le Reveil* of Geneva, fulminating against abuse of the term 'proletarian culture', observed:

The proletariat is, by definition, and very often in reality, an ignorant person whose culture is necessarily extremely limited. In every field the past has



bequeathed an inheritance of inestimable value which cannot be attributed to any one particular class. The proletarian claims, in the first place, a greater participation in culture, so it is a form of wealth of which he no longer wants to be deprived. Bourgeois thinkers, writers and artists have given us works important to our emancipation. But self-styled proletarian intellectuals have often cooked us indigestible dishes.

'Proletarian culture' exists, but it is limited to an occupational *savoir-faire* and an encyclopaedic smattering of knowledge backed up by desultory reading habits. A characteristic of proletarian culture is to be relatively ignorant of progress in the sciences and arts. Among the self-taught you will find fanatic disciples of Haeckel's monism, Büchner's materialism, and even to classic spiritism, but you will not find any among really cultivated people. Any *theory* will start to become popular and find its way into 'proletarian culture', which is greedy for luxuries. Like a popular romance it is full of princes, marquises and receptions in drawing rooms. The more popular and sought-for a book like this is by the self-taught the more it is indigestible and abstruse.

Many of these people have never read *The Conquest of Bread* or the dialogue *Among Peasants*, but they have read *The World as Will and Representation* and *The Critique of Pure Reason*. A cultivated person who is, for instance, concerned with the natural sciences and has no knowledge of higher mathematics will be careful not to pass judgement on Einstein. But a self-educated person, on the whole, is crudely rash in his judgements, and, in general, enjoys speaking in a difficult way.

For the half cultivated it isn't a frightening prospect to start a magazine, not to mention a weekly. He will write about slavery in Egypt, sun spots, the 'atheism' of Giordano Bruno, 'evidence' of the non-existence of God, and of the Hegelian dialectic. But of his own workshop, his life as a workman, he won't say a word.

The self-taught person ceases to be one of a kind as soon as he succeeds in forming for himself a real culture. But in those circumstances his culture is no longer working-class. A cultivated worker like Rudolf Rocker is like a black brought to Europe as a baby and bred by a cultivated family or college. The origin, like the skin colour, doesn't count. No-one would see in Rocker the former saddler. But when Grave emerges from his vulgarisation of Kropotkin he reminds one, with regret, that he was a cobbler.

So-called working-class culture is, in short, a parasitic symbiosis of real culture, which is still bourgeois or half-bourgeois. It is easier for a Tita Ruffo\* or a Mussolini to emerge from the proletariat than a scientist or philosopher. This is not because genius is the monopoly of one class, but because 99 per cent of the proletariat, having left primary



school, is denied a systematic culture by a life of work and brutalisation. Education and training for all is one of the finest tenets of socialism and from a communist society will rise *natural élites*. But at present it is grotesque to talk of the 'proletarian culture' of the philologist Gramsci or of the 'proletarian spirit' of the bourgeois Terracini\*. Socialist doctrine is the creation of bourgeois intellectuals. This, as De Max remarks in *Beyond Marxism* 'is less a doctrine of the proletariat than a doctrine for the proletariat'. The main activists and theorists of anarchism, from Godwin to Bakunin, from Kropotkin to Cafiero, from Mella to Faure, from Covelli to Malatesta, from Fabbri to Galleani, from Gori to Voltairine de Cleyre, were from aristocratic or middle class backgrounds. Proudhon, with his working class background, is of all anarchist writers the one most influenced by petit-bourgeois ideology and sentiments. Grave, a shoemaker, fell into the most bourgeois type of democratic chauvinism. And it is undeniable that the syndicalist organisers of working class origin, from Rossoni to Meledandri, provide, proportionately, the greatest number of examples.

*Russian populism* and Sorelianism are two forms of workerist romanticism, the formal inheritor of which has been demagogic bolshevism. Gorki, who is one of the writers who lived the longest and most completely among the working class, writes:

When they [the propagandists] spoke about the people I sensed at once that they saw them differently from me. That surprised me and made me diffident towards myself. For them the people were the incarnation of wisdom, spiritual beauty, goodness and kindness of heart, unique, almost divine, depository of all that is beautiful, great and just. This people was certainly not the people I knew.

Arturo Labriola\*, from whom I take the above quotation in his *Al di là del capitalismo e del Socialismo* (Beyond Capitalism and Socialism, Paris 1931), follows it with these recollections:

To this I could add my personal experience. I was born into a milieu of artisans-artists who lived in direct contact with the working classes and were themselves of the working class. The workers I knew from the first years of my life were men in every way worthy of compassion, instinctive, credulous, inclined to superstition, orientated towards materialism, at the same time affectionate and naive with their children, incapable of drawing from their own life as workers a single line of thought [that could be said to be] particular to their class. Those who, divesting themselves of the superstitions and the prejudices of their class, came to socialism, saw it only from a material viewpoint, as a movement aimed at improving their lot. And naturally they



expected such improvement from the hands of their leaders who changed from being idols to traitors according to the situation of the moment, without any merit or blame on their part. It is undeniable that socialism did improve their lot in every way; and I dare to say that my first impulse in the direction of socialism came from the great compassion which the misery of the wretched inspired in me and from my experience of the benefit which the movement gave them.

Malatesta certainly did not see the proletariat through the rose-coloured spectacles of Kropotkin, and Luigi Fabbri wrote in one article, referring to the insurrectionary period after the [First] war: 'Too many people, among the poor, too many workers seriously believed that the moment was about to arrive when they did not have to work or when only the masters would have to work'. Whoever thinks back on the history of the workers' movement will see the prevalence of a very understandable moral immaturity, but one that gave the obvious lie to the inflated exaltors of the masses.

The gimmick of calling avant-garde groups and working-class elites 'proletarian' is one to be discarded without further ado. The demagogues flatter the crowd but hide from it the truths essential to any real emancipation. A 'working class civilisation', a 'proletarian society', a 'dictatorship of the proletariat', these are terms which must be ditched. There is no such thing as a 'working-class consciousness' as the typical characteristic of an entire class. There is no radical opposition between 'working-class consciousness' and 'bourgeois consciousness'. The Greeks did not fight for glory as Renan claimed. And nor does the proletariat fight for the 'sense of the sublime' as Sorel tried laboriously to argue in his *Reflections on Violence*.

The *ideal worker* of Marxism and socialism is a mythical personage. He belongs to the metaphysics of socialist romanticism, not to history. In the United States and Australia it is the workers' unions which call for restrictive immigration policies. The worker (see Maly R. Beard's *A Short History of the American Labour Movement*, New York, 1928) has played only a miserable role in the emancipations of the blacks in the United States and black workers, even today, are excluded from almost every American trade union organisation. Movements boycotting fascist dictatorships, colonial outrages, etc. are thin on the ground and unsuccessful. Strikes of class solidarity or with strictly political aims are extremely rare.

This utilitarian attitude, this feebleness, this general inertia, is particularly true of the industrial proletariat.

Every now and again, when I happen to read or hear the industrial



proletariat being exalted as the revolutionary and communist elite, I remember personal experiences of mine or am led to make psychological observations. I am led to suspect that in those who assert what seems to me to be a myth, there is either the infatuation of a 'provincial' recently moved into a big industrial centre or some kind of infatuation with a type of occupation. When I read Gramsci's *l'Ordine Nuovo*, especially in its first phase as a newspaper, psychological reflections led me to reject its continual exaltation of big industry as the creator of unity/homogeneity, of communist maturity on the part of the office workers, etc.

For instance, I imagined Gramsci arriving in Turin from his native Sardinia and enchanted by the workings of the industrial metropolis. The big demonstrations, the concentrations of specialised workers, the feverish vastness of the rhythm of trade union life of the industrial city — these, I told myself, fascinated him. Russian bolshevik literature seemed to me to be a copy of the same psychological process. In a country like Russia where the masses were extremely backward, Moscow, Petrograd and the other industrial centres must have seemed like oases of the communist revolution. Inspired by Marxist industrialism the bolsheviks must have become infatuated with the factory, just as the Russian revolutionaries of Bakunin's time were led to become infatuated by Western culture.

In Italy the industrial mystique of those connected with *l'Ordine Nuovo* seemed to me, therefore, as basically a reaction similar to that of futurism.

Another aspect which might offer an explanation was that of the natural tendency of industrial technicians — a tendency shared in all specialist areas — to see in 'industry / the alfa and omega of human progress'. And in this context it seemed to me significant that there were a lot of engineers among the leaders of the Communist Party.

I am still of this view and find fresh confirmation in the attitude of some of the republicans influenced by communist ideology.

A typical example is that of A. Chiodini, who in the February 1933 number of *Problemi della Rivoluzione Italiana* criticising the rural and southern-orientated policies of *Giustizia e Libertà* declares:

The industrial proletariat is the sole objective revolutionary force in society. Because only the proletariat is in a position to free itself from the closed class mentality and rise to a dignity of class, a collective force which is aware of its historical task.

The Italian revolution, like all revolutions, can only be the work of homogeneous forces capable of being motivated by long-term ideals.

Now the only homogeneous force which is able to fight for a concrete ideal of liberty and which in order to carry out the fight for a long-term aim and not for



a fixed time limit is the working class. Today it is this class which, having come through so many ordeals and tragedies, is entitled to assume the role of the leading revolutionary class.

That the industrial proletariat is one of the main revolutionary forces in a communist sense is too evident to need any discussion. But on the other hand it is evident too that the homogeneity of that proletariat lies more in things than in spiritual matters and moreover in that agglomeration of individuals which, in a very large majority are wage earners without any real differences, either actual or perceived.

The particularism of the industrial worker is too obvious to permit of those generic and generalised exaltations which many Marxists make.

The corporationist egoism of the United States has led to a real political xenophobia and the typically industrial corporations have always shown themselves to be among the most persistent in urging the government to restrict the immigration of workers. The same applies to New Zealand. But let us limit ourselves to Italy. The industrial workers have always favoured industrial power. Gaetano Salvemini's\* book *Tendenze vecchie e necessità nuove del movimento operaio italiano* (Old Tendencies and New Necessities for the Italian Workers' Movement, Bologna, 1922), provides a wealth of examples. The following strike me as the most typical.

In 1914 the workers in the sugar industry, 4,500 of them — a very small number, that is — were the subject of protective measures by the reformist socialists, who urged the government to take import control measures on sugar without taking into account the damaging effect on the industry of the high price of the raw material. This action hurt the pockets of all Italy's consumers, forced to pay a higher price not only for sugar but also for jams and preserves. Not only this, but it cut down internal demand for the latter, inhibiting exports and therefore cutting down the possibility of employment for the workers in the industry. Thus, the sugar workers should either have urged the protection of both industries or free trade in sugar, since they could then have been absorbed by the development of the jams and preserves industry. This was in the general interest. But how expect the sugar refinery workers, who got 'high wages, unlike other workers' (*Avanti!*, 10 March, 1910) to sacrifice their privileged position?

Another example: before the (first) war there were 37 lignite mines in Italy which, in 1913, produced 700,000 tons of combustible fuel. During the war, the cost of foreign coal having risen astronomically, it became worthwhile to exploit even the very poor strata. The number of mines under exploitation increased to 137 but production did not grow



by more than 400,000 tons, part of which came from a more intensive production of the old mines. After the war the cost of foreign coal dropped, demand for lignite diminished.

The new-found miners, almost all of them peasants from the surrounding areas, were threatened with being sacked or with reductions in wages. There were big demonstrations, their slogan: No sackings! And a socialist deputy, president of a cooperative mining consortium, put pressure on the government to keep up production of lignite to wartime figures — indeed, to push them up to four million tons per annum. He also called for the railways to convert a certain number of locomotives for lignite burning and pay the firemen more to compensate them for the extra work involved, to oblige the use of lignite by law by all public services wherever lignite could harmlessly replace coal; to get the government to subsidise the companies which undertook to build electric power stations fuelled by lignite, and to exempt those same companies from prosecution for excess profits in wartime.

In other words, this socialist deputy was asking that millions should be spent simply to keep in work a few hundred miners, most of whom could have gone back to their fields.

It needs to be pointed out that the miners' protests in the coal basin of the Valdarno were led by organisers of USI. The above example is therefore doubly interesting and has to be carefully considered because it highlights an area (protectionism) neglected by the anarchists involved in the syndicalist unions and it shows the kind of problems that would reappear for us in a revolutionary period (the tendency of specific categories of worker to try to keep industries going which are no longer profitable to the national economy).

What has been the attitude of the anarchists involved in the CGL and USI to the collaboration between socialists and bosses? When the leaders of FIOM [Italian Metal Workers' Union] gave priority to the interests of 30,000 steel workers living in the sheltered world of protectionism and state subsidy over those of 270,000 metal workers who had everything to gain from having cheap raw material at their disposal, what was the attitude of the FIOM anarchists? It seems to me that the anarchists who made up part of the workers' organisations have not had a clear perception of their role as educators. It would have been a classist work of education to recall that the millions given for the protection of the parasitic industries were extorted to a great extent from large numbers of other Italian workers. The anarchists allowed themselves to be bypassed by the socialists who, for demagogic reasons relinquished that just and beautiful intransigence of the days when electoralism, bureaucracy and collaboration with the bourgeoisie were



not yet triumphant. To the Ligurian industrialists who were sacking 3,000 workers and threatened to sack another 20,000 within a month if the government refused to stop lowering subsidies to the merchant navy, the socialist *Avanti!*, then edited by the reformist Leonida Bissolati, replied:

The workers know that the millions given to protect the shipping industry have been extorted in great part from large numbers of other Italian workers; so they refuse to countenance the continuation of a state of affairs in which the workers of one area have their bread paid for by the hunger of the workers in the rest of Italy. (*Avanti!*, 24 January, 1901.)

To what a degrading state collaboration between workers and bosses had sunk in the industrial areas is shown by the fact that so-called revolutionaries provoked unrest to obtain from the government work for the war industry. In *Unità* of 11 July, 1913, Salvemini writes:

The Chamber of Commerce of Spezia, run by syndicalists, republicans and revolutionary socialists, has been organizing a general strike.

To protest against the killing of some worker? — No.

To protest against an iniquitous class sentence passed by a judge? — No.

In solidarity with some group of striking workers? — No.

To fight some illegal action on the part of the political or administrative authorities? — No.

Why then? — To protest against a government which is threatening to take away from the Spezia shipyard the overhaul of the cruiser Andrea Doria.

It goes without saying that at the first occasion the subversives of Spezia will stage on their own doorstep some 'solemn protest meeting' against 'unproductive' public expenditure.

It is worth noting that at the head of this . . . revolutionary protest movement was a cooperative made up of metal workers (*Giornale d'Italia*, 24 April). And it is also worth noting that the unrest in Spezia took place at the same time as the Administrative Council of the firm of Ansaldo was complaining in its annual report that it did not have enough orders. At the same time workers in the Orlando dockyard in Livorno demonstrated to demand that the State find work for this dockyard (*Avanti!*, 14 May, 1913). And the Neapolitan deputies lobbied [Prime Minister] Giolitti for 'new orders for gun-carriages, cannons, fuses and shells' so that there would be no further dismissals of metal workers (*Corriere della Sera*, 24 May). And the clerical-moderate-nationalist newspapers were campaigning for the Government to order four big new battleships from the shipyards.

During the Settimana Rossa (Red Week) the industrial centres stayed closed. During the interventionist agitation the industrial complexes were among the least active areas where anti-militarist campaigns were concerned. During the post-war unrest the industrial areas were the slowest to respond. No industrial centre rose up against fascism in the



way that Parma, Florence or Ancona did and the working-class masses have given no collective show of tenaciousness or spirit of sacrifice like that of Molinella.

The agrarian strikes in the districts of Modena and Parma remain, in the history of Italian class war, unique in their epic struggle. And the most generous of the workers' organisers have come from Puglia [in the South]. But none of this is acknowledged. People write and talk about the Occupation of the Factories but the occupation of the land, far greater in importance, is almost forgotten. The industrial proletariat is exalted, while as anyone who has lived and fought in the mainly agricultural areas knows, the countryside has always fed the avant garde political agitations in the cities and has always given proof of its generosity in struggle especially where trade unions are concerned.

Easy prediction: some mandarin will say I don't have a 'proletarian spirit' and some readers will assume I have set out to devalue the proletariat.

An echo replies on my behalf: that of the warm applause which, in the naval dockyards and the war industry workshops, greets the announcement that a submarine will be built or cannons forged.

What replies on my behalf is the communist tactic of acting from within the big corporations for economic demands.

What replies on my behalf, above all, is the resignation of the Italian proletariat, especially the industrial proletariat. To wait for the people to awaken, to speak of mass action, to reduce the antifascist struggle to the development and maintenance of the structures of the Party and the Union, instead of concentrating upon revolutionary action which, alone, can break the atmosphere of moral humiliation to which the whole Italian proletariat is succumbing, this is cowardice, idiocy and betrayal.

### Glossary of Names

**Camillo Berneri** (1897-1937) One of the outstanding Italian anarchists of the 'new generation' of the '20s and '30s. He was a teacher at the liceo of Camerino until the fascists demanded that all teachers join the party. Berneri and his young family went into exile (1929?) in the Paris region but from then until his assassination by the Communists during the May Days in Barcelona 1937 he was arrested and deported by one government after another at the behest of the Mussolini government. He saw the insides of prisons in France, Belgium, Luxemburg and Germany. In 1936 he was among the first Italian anarchists to join the struggle in Spain and for the first months on the Huesca front, but at the request of the Italian comrades he returned to Barcelona where among other



tasks he edited the Italian language weekly *Guerra di Classe*. Freedom Press have published a number of his writings in the Centenary Volume 2 *Spain: Social Revolution - Counter Revolution 1936-39* including the outstanding Open Letter to Federica Montseny. In *Why Work: Arguments for the Leisure Society* is a translation of his pamphlet 'Il Lavoro Attraente' (English title 'The Problem of Work'). And in *The May Days Barcelona 1937* Souchy's account of the May Days includes references to the Berneri assassination by the Communists, there is also a photograph of Berneri.

**Carlo Rosselli** (1900-1937) staunch anti-fascist and founder in exile (Paris) of the 'Giustizia e Libertà' movement. He was very close to the anarchists and in 1936 fought with the Italian anarchists on the Huesca front in Spain. Wounded and sick he returned to France to recuperate but a few months later he and his brother Professor Nello Rosselli were murdered by fascist gunmen. See *Spain: Social Revolution - Counter Revolution 1936-39* (Freedom Press 1990) for two articles on Rosselli one of them by Emma Goldman who wrote that he enjoyed 'the affection and admiration of the anarchists at the front as well as in the rear'.

**Antonio Gramsci** A leading Italian Communist intellectual in the '20s and '30s. Editor of the daily paper *Ordine Nuovo*.

**Arturo Labriola** Italian socialist and follower of Sorel. Was Minister of Labour in the Giolitti government 1920.

**Tita Ruffo** Famous Italian operatic baritone of the '20s.

**Gaetano Salvemini** Italian historian. Socialist with sympathies for the anarchists. Author of the Left Book Club *Under the Axe of Fascism*.

**Anatol Lunaciarsky** Bolshevik leader and People's Commissar for Education under Lenin. (See Emma Goldman's *Living My Life* for account of her meeting with him in the Kremlin and their discussion on education.)









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## George Walford

### Class Politics: an Exhausted Myth

Erect upon the barricade with the Red Flag overhead, sledgehammer in one hand, *Das Kapital* in the other, the classic figure of communist revolution wears overalls. Anarchism flies the Black Flag and repudiates all dictatorship, even that of the proletariat, but it, too, sees itself as a movement of the oppressed; the idea that those who benefit most from this society will want to preserve it, and those who benefit least will want to overturn it, has become one of the unexamined bases of political thinking. It has not always been so. Saint-Simon, Fourier and Robert Owen intended to benefit the oppressed, but for the power to put their schemes into effect they looked to the rulers, the Frenchmen appealing to Napoleon and Owen addressing the American Senate. They made an impression — the word ‘socialism’ was coined as a name for Owen’s ideas — but fell short of their main object.

Marx ascribed their lack of success to utopianism; he named class interest as the motive power of political movements, and although anarchists repudiate marxism and its methods, yet many of them believe — most often they just take it for granted — that the unemployed, and people obliged to work for a poor living, will at least incline towards anarchism. They too accept the myth that class position determines, or significantly influences, political attachment.

Most of the wealthy don’t declare themselves anarchists and those who do seem eccentric. Most busdrivers, housewives and school-teachers don’t support it either, yet when one of these does belong to the movement it seems right; there is not the same feeling that here we have an oddity. Many who would not say outright that anarchism is a class-linked movement still tend to connect it with the lower levels of the economic pyramid, and most anarchists would be uneasy to find themselves linked with people wearing top hats and smoking big cigars, even if they didn’t carry bulging sacks labelled PROFITS. The class-politics myth clings, linking anarchism with the people lacking

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*Photo (top left) — Agency caption reads: “Police Terrorism renewed in Passaic Gera Mills Strike”. No date. Photo (bottom left) — Pithead scene somewhere in Britain during a strike (or lock-out?). The date is “post 1920”.*



wealth even though most of them don't support the movement now, never have supported it, and give no sign that they ever will support it.

When you ask *why* most of the people who have to earn a living don't support anarchism, the usual answer blames the influence of the rich and powerful. They, it is said, make sure those they employ are taught to respect the monarchy and the establishment of the church, to work for their bosses and to obey the government and the police. They are said to stop anarchism getting a fair hearing.

Taken as a group anarchists are mentally active, argumentative, literate and highly vocal. Anybody who can stop them making themselves heard is bringing off a clever trick; how is it done? The rich and powerful control most of the newspapers, the television and radio stations, and won't allow the anarchists access to them; so the argument runs. It has to be agreed that the bosses own these things and get the profits from them, but do they control them in the sense of being free to decide what shall be published? On any one day, perhaps, but over the long period only if they don't mind losing their investment.

Take a newspaper, one privately owned. To show a profit it must please its advertisers, and these need a mass readership. The proprietors have no way of forcing people to buy their journal; they can get them to do so only by printing things they will want to read, and owners of magazines and radio or television stations also are obliged to present a message adapted, in form and content, to the intended audience. When media are subsidised or owned by the state this makes little difference, for with small audiences they won't produce much effect and are unlikely to retain their subsidies. All the mass media have to attract the mass audience and they can only do this by offering what people want. They don't say much about anarchism because few people have any interest in it.

This usually brings the answer: "Well, of course people aren't interested. They've never been allowed to get to know what anarchism really means." That argument does not stand up; those who have become anarchists provide a living refutation of it, proving that control of the media by the capitalists, and of education by the state, does not prevent people taking up anarchism.

In Hyde Park at weekends you can *see* how people react to anarchist ideas. Each year thousands hear the message at Speakers' Corner, and occasionally one of them will listen, accept it, and go on from there, but most turn away. The ones who decide that anarchism shall rarely be mentioned in the media, and almost never properly presented, are the viewers, the readers, the listeners. They don't intend it but their response has that effect.

Now turn to government. Like the media, in order to survive it has



to give the great majority what they will accept. The press barons can't force people to read newspapers they don't want, and the government cannot force the general body of the people to obey laws they don't want. When the police disperse a demonstration it looks as though they have overwhelming power, but — in Britain for example — no demonstration ever attracts more than a few tens of thousands out of fifty million; the police need to deal with only a tiny minority.

The British government could put down the Indian Mutiny because most of the sepoys remained loyal, and the Easter Rising because most of the Irish did not actively support it. But when the Indian people began to turn against them they had to leave, and when the American people began to turn against the Vietnam war their government had to drop it. Government cannot stand against the big numbers.

The government of the USA could not enforce prohibition and British governments could not stop off-course betting. That doesn't sound like a very big thing to do, but it beat them. They tried all through the twenties, thirties and forties and into the fifties, and finally gave up, allowing betting-shops and turning the government itself into a bookmaker with Premium Bonds. They can't stop hooliganism, vandalism, prostitution, shoplifting or pornography. No government can end illegal drug-taking and no government has ever been able to stop crime.

Anarchists tend to speak as if government were powerful and efficient, but the newspapers repeatedly show it confused, blundering and incompetent. Government can't get buildings that are sure to stay up, or motorways that will carry the traffic. Its police break the law, its weapons systems seldom work properly, its space shuttle blows up, its nuclear power stations burn down, and it keeps falling over its own feet. Remember Watergate, look at the *Spycatcher* nonsense. Government is constantly giving way before opposition; few schemes are announced that do not get radically altered before being put into practice, and many are quietly dropped. Government can only get what the people allow it to have, only do what they allow it to do.

The armed forces of government are of use mainly against the forces of other governments. Within their own countries the police are useful only against minorities, and even then their effectiveness is limited. Governments can put isolated people or small groups in jail — though they can't always keep them there — but, as Heath discovered, government has to be careful to get most of the people on its side before it tackles the trade unions. If one regiment rebels, or two or three regiments, government can suppress them, but every successful revolution shows that when a large part of the army turns awkward there isn't much government can do about it. Who can dragoon the



dragoons? And the army, like the police, draws its strength from the people.

Communist governments can no more force their people than tsarist or capitalist ones. For forty years in China and seventy years in Russia they tried their hardest, using force almost without restraint, slaughtering millions in the attempt to impose a collectivist economy. They failed. Both these countries are now moving towards a system much like western capitalism, and they are doing so because most of their people have persisted in preferring this.

Government cannot compel the general body of the people, and it can deceive or mislead them only within limits, for a society depending on technology has to keep the sources of information open. On the big issues, such as whether we shall have an anarchist society, government has to go where the people want, and it doesn't make much difference whether it be formally democratic or not; all the great revolutions have burst out in the absence of democracy. If the people, or a majority of them, or sometimes even a large minority of them, decide to disobey the government, it gets disobeyed, and if they decide to overthrow it it gets overthrown. It may look as though governments hold the final power, but that is because they are usually careful to keep within the limits of what the people will accept. Anything outside those limits governments can't do, and they recognise this with the phrase 'politically impossible'.

Capitalism and the authoritarian state survive because they suit the preference of the great numbers. Even if the rich and the rulers were to *want* anarchy they couldn't get it by themselves for, finally, *power belongs to the people*. That is no aspiration but a straightforward statement of present fact. The reason we don't have anarchy is not that the upper class or the government or the state oppose it, but that the general body of the people don't want it.

Most of the rich and powerful are against anarchism, but that hardly matters. They can be left out of account, because if, over any long period or in any serious way, they go against what the people want, they lose their power. They lose it the way the French Kings, the Russian Tsars, the Chinese Emperors and the Shah of Persia lost theirs. The way ex-President Marcos lost his.

A great many anarchists will deny most of this, yet if you look at what they themselves are doing, instead of just listening to what they say, you find their actions supporting it. They try to convert not the rich, the rulers, the newspaper owners or the employers but the people, and by doing that they show themselves to be believing, deep down, below the level of words, that these hold the decisive power. In this they are right, for although one person with wealth has more power than one



without it, the people without come in far greater numbers, so that as a whole, as a class, they have more power than the wealthy. In their thousands of millions they decide what sort of society we shall have, and so far they have preferred not to have anarchy. Their class position has not led them to support the movement, and there is no good reason for expecting it to do so in the future.

I started off with the classic image of the revolutionary on the barricade, and that has the great defect of failing to show that the opposition to revolution also comes mainly from the people. When bullets replace ballots the overalls do not assemble in one trench with the top hats in the other; there has never been a revolution with the rich and powerful on one side and the people opposing them; a bayonet has a worker on each end in revolution as in war.

In the first great upheaval of modern times the two sides were known as *aristos* and *sans-culottes*. The *aristos* were not all aristocrats, and the *sans-culottes* were not bare-assed rabble but modernists, wearing revolutionary trousers instead of reactionary knee-breeches. If the revolutionaries had had only the tiny minority of aristocrats against them they'd have found things a lot easier than they did. As the support later given to Napoleon showed, vast numbers of French people preferred control, hierarchy and competition to freedom, equality and brotherhood. In the French Revolution the two sides were distinguished not by their class position but by their politics, and this has continued to be so in later revolutions, successful and otherwise. Franco's soldiers came mostly from the same class as most of their opponents, so did those of the White armies, and so did the Red soldiers who put down Makhno; political divisions do not correspond with class divisions and are not coming to do so. If we keep on believing anarchism to be a class movement we shall be clinging to a myth that never did work very well and is now losing what little effectiveness it once possessed.

It is not only a false myth but a dangerous one. If you believe the people to have aspirations that can be satisfied by anarchism (or communism or socialism) and a minority to be holding them back, then the obvious solution is to get rid of that minority. You pull down the emperors, the tsars, the kings and the priests. That doesn't help, so you knock off the rich. When that makes no difference you start on the bureaucrats; Stalin's functionaries were jailed or executed sometimes down to the fifth replacement. When the people still don't move towards you, you start on the intellectuals and the successful peasants. When those have gone, and it still makes no difference, you start looking for hidden enemies of the revolution; you start blaming, and



jailing, and killing, ordinary people who dare to criticise. All these things happened in Russia under Stalin and in China under Mao.

The myth of class politics has done a great deal of harm, and the sooner we get rid of it the better. Anarchists can be old or young, tall or short, male or female, black, brown, white, red or yellow, educated or uneducated; they can also be rich or poor. What matters is that they hold anarchist beliefs.

## *Peter Neville*

### **Class**

Many people think Sociology is about facts. It is not. It is about ideas or more properly debates. It is about what we think are facts at one time, a constant re-working of the inter-weave of people and events we call society. It is an attempt to interpret, to understand and appreciate and by this present a clearer and more coherent picture of what we understand as reality. And as I suppose most people who enter Sociology do not like the society they live in, it is a subject which appeals to the politically committed. Which is why I find it so puzzling that so few anarchists enter Sociology and so few Sociologists are attracted to anarchism. Perhaps the former is because so many anarchists claim to know what is wrong with society before they examine it and the latter because so many Sociologists see anarchists as impractical dreamers out of touch with reality.

Take anarchist writers. Many appear to be saying "I have read a book. It is a good book. It changed my life. I will proselyse these ideas for the rest of my life." It is as if no other writings existed and more importantly, ignoring the fact that the writer was perhaps writing as part of an intellectual milieu, that other writers said things too, and that the debate continued and is perhaps continuing to this day. I often wonder when I read Colin Ward, and I mean no disrespect here, whether if I mentioned writers such as Robert Park, John Rex, Ray Pahl and Manuel Castells and the whole gamut of Urban Sociology this would be familiar to him. These are names familiar to most Sociologists, to town planners and housing officers. Do not misunderstand I am not bugging Colin I am just saying this is part of



the intellectual milieu of Sociologists, or to put it another way of twentieth century intellectual life, and I would certainly expect a GCSE student to have heard the names and an A level student to know the debates (for those unfamiliar with these Martin Slattery's *Urban Sociology* is fairly accessible). To keep on talking about certain writers as if no-one else existed because the writers appeared to follow a libertarian line or who dropped words like anarchism almost every other word is not only intellectually unsatisfying but it is an insult to would be converts.

The physical scientists are rather cocky about the knowledge they gain by the scientific (hypothetico-deductive) method because rocks, plants and animals do not answer back so those who study big science can superimpose their theories on it and call this truth whereas we social scientists have to be more circumspect and show more humility because we realise people have intentionality.

When we talk about social class we have to be careful. R. H. Tawney cautions us to note that there is a distinction between the fact of class and the consciousness of class. Sociologists categorise class in two ways — the objective and the subjective. The objective is the fitting of people into categories by sociologists (Tawney's 'fact of class'). We look at their wealth, their upbringing, their education, the way they make their living and so on and this enables us to develop categories like putting a dustman into one category and an accountant into another. We are not saying one person is better or more deserving than another but that we place them in these categories in relation to some system of scoring in each case, like the amount of remuneration paid to each or the standard of education required to do the job. When we talk about subjective social class we ask people how they see themselves.

What interests us as sociologists are the many apparent discrepancies between how people see themselves and how they may be categorised because one finds people on quite low incomes seeing themselves as members of quite a high class and sometimes those on quite high incomes placing themselves in a lower category. It would not matter too much except social class position often plays an important role in relation to lifestyle, expenditure patterns, political outlook and overall world view. If anarchists were interested in voting behaviour one could point out that the reasons why the Conservatives have been in power for so long is because they are maintained there by their substantial working class vote.

Some working class see themselves as a traditional proletariat who would consciously oppose other classes. Others see themselves as working class differentials, that is they see themselves as working class who support the status system i.e. they think those who are wealthier



are 'born to rule'. Yet again others see themselves not as working class, although Sociologists would categorise them as such objectively, but as subjectively middle class. Incidentally the traditional differentials often have as little time for these as the traditional proletariat. Both these often see the middle class with contempt and have no necessary wish to be part of them.

The reality of class consciousness should never be confused with the reality of what Marx called 'a class acting for itself', people trying to achieve revolutionary change by harnessing class consciousness to political action against other classes, the ones with less wealth and power striving against those with more wealth and power.)

Movement up or down the strata is called social mobility. Thus workers who have a discontinuity between being objectively members of a class whilst seeing themselves subjectively members of another class are in all likelihood those who have changed their class within a lifetime either because they themselves have moved like the child of working class parents who becomes a doctor or because their occupation or income has moved them like for instance the clerk who in a non-literate situation might have had higher status than the non-writer but has a much lower status in a situation where everyone is literate (at least if literacy is in demand). They may dress like the middle class but income-wise are objectively working class. We have seen the proletarianisation of the school teacher within the last two decades. Sociologists are interested in this discrepancy between perceived fact and perceived reality because this is a central debate in Sociology. A typical A level question might be: "The affluent working class is no more middle class than the blackcoated worker is working class" Discuss.

Here you must bear with me because I do not know how much Sociology you know although I do get the impression sometimes that many *Freedom* writers know much less than they imagine. They admit they know nothing about Physics and Chemistry which is about forces and materials but insist that because they live in society they know everything about Sociology. Yet Sociology like Physics and Chemistry is a technical subject with its own breadth and depth and technical language and not just another name for common sense. What I am giving you is the watered down version.

There are a number of schools of thought or traditions about social class. Marx for instance saw social class in the sense of a political model. Two social forces perpetually at loggerheads with each other creating a new type of society out of the friction. The slave mode of production of large estates with its fight between master and slave leading to the feudal mode of production of manorial life with landowner versus serf



leading to capitalism. The capitalist mode of production with the fight between bourgeoisie and proletariat leading to communism. Marx's model was not a picture of how society was but a re-writing of history to produce a view of reality to enable the proletariat to understand their position and develop a class consciousness to act as a 'class for itself' to break down the imposed ideology and free the proletarian thinking from the bosses' version of reality to a revolutionary workers' version of reality and disengage the worker from the acceptance of the legitimacy of imposed rule.

Max Weber suggested this might be a sound revolutionary model for political activists to sell the picture to the workers but it was far too simplistic a picture of reality. Stratification was more complex than this. It should be seen from the point of view of three dimensions: class, economy and power. Individuals and groups should be stratified in relation to these dimensions and only when they coincided could they be truly identified as a social class. There are other versions and attempts have been made by researchers to stratify occupation, income, socio-economic group and so on. The terms upper, middle and lower are not really sociological terms although they have been used by Sociologists, especially in the United States, in the forties, fifties and sixties (very few people will admit to being lower class so the term working class is substituted).

There are a number of terminological problems. When nineteenth century and earlier writers talked about this threefold categorisation they were more circumspect. They tended to talk about the common people. Oliver Cromwell for instance, a seventeenth century country landowner, would have been quite surprised to be called anything but middle class. The gentry were not the upper classes. That is in part and only in part (as readers of Christopher Hill or Brailsford point out) one of the reasons for the Civil War. If someone suggested a doctor was part of the middle classes at the time this would also be greeted with surprise. Doctors went through a period of upward social mobility in the eighteenth and particularly the nineteenth centuries.

More recently we have debates within political journals as to whether one person or another is working class or middle class. Usually the people they accuse of being middle class are white collar (blackcoated) workers. To the genuinely middle class these people are barely thought of as middle class. Subjectively they might think of themselves as middle class. The rest of the middle class have other ideas seeing them as respectable working class, upper working class or artisans.

There is also this feeling if you work in industry, in construction or any manual-type work you are working class. Many middle class people get their hands dirty. You try working with money, it's dirty stuff.



Even the upper class may get their hands dirty at some time: powder stains, fox blood.

People say "I work, I am therefore a worker and *ipso facto* a member of the working class". Who is kidding who? No-one is suggesting members of the other classes do not work. Members of the middle class do not get their money by lazing around but frequently working far harder than the average member of the working class and think of all those serfs the aristocracy had to kill off in the Peasants' Revolt. Killing is hard work. Again being a member of the working class does not imply virtue either. There can be caring, loving people in any class.

Is there a strict division at the boundary or is it flexible? It is this boundary which fascinates sociologists. I may be objectively middle class (at the very lower end, in teaching) but subjectively, definitely working class but I do not see myself as a member of The Rough. There are divisions within all classes. And yes I believe in equality as an ideal worth working for not as a reality. If I have appeared antipathetic to feminists sometimes it is not because I do not believe in equality or am a misogynist, but because I am conscious that certain groups such as middle class women are manipulating the system in their own 'class' interests.

The same can be said about middle class blacks. I must admit although I met a number of blacks in higher education none were working class neither were many of them women. To those who say sexism and racism transcends all in 'our' campaign I have to say I am little interested in seeing middle class women getting jobs which might have gone to the working class and yes I am glad Nelson Mandela has been released but this does not mean I want to see the gradual inclusion of more middle class blacks into white South African society. I do not want to see caste society becoming class society and then becoming an inter-sexual, inter-racial caste society again.

Some say anarchism transcends class interests. If you reject class it does not make it go away. If I bitch on about my promotion prospects as an FE teacher it is not because I do not support equality of opportunity or because I am too overly concerned with transitional factors. If I go up a grade I get less teaching and more money. These are nice to have. For the middle class anarchist intellectual who says "I reject class" or "Who believes in status?" I say "I wish I could afford to reject money in our present society and status is not (necessarily) a belief system but a means of consumption and I have a vociferous appetite".

So that's an introduction to social class and an introduction to Sociology. Let us now have some articles and comment from you about Sociology and Social Policy. I do not want to be over-dogmatic but I



live in the twentieth century. I'm not into utopias. Let us have some stuff on how you see society and in what ways you might like to change it and not about French bomb throwers of the eighteen eighties or re-fighting the Spanish Civil War all over again. And if *Freedom* or *The Raven* ignores this then we might have to start our own journal.

## Donald Room

### Myself and the Working Class

When a letter from me about the working class was published in a recent *Freedom*, a sociology lecturer telephoned me to say "I don't tell you about printing, so you should not tell me about class". But you need no special knowledge of printing to have useful opinions about whether a piece of printing is legible, and I need not be an expert on social classes to describe my personal acquaintance with the working class.

In the late 1930s, my father was earning three pounds fifteen shillings a week for a 48-hour week. We were not poor. My father had a highly skilled and responsible job. Most people earned less than three pounds a week, and state unemployment pay was five shillings a week.

At the same time, Emmanuel Shinwell was employed as a fulltime organiser for the Labour Party and earning £250 a year (i.e. £50 a year more than my father), which he described as a 'minimal salary' in his hundredth birthday television interview. There was no contradiction. In this country before World War Two, three pounds fifteen a week was good pay for the working class (paid weekly at so much an hour), but £250 a year was minimal for the salaried class (paid monthly at so much a year).

An English woman whose home was in Indonesia where her father managed an enterprise for a multinational, told me she did not see how anyone could manage on less than £25,000 a year. So how much, I asked, were the servants paid at home? "Four pounds a month. Good pay by their standard."

She assumed I had changed the subject, as the questions of what anyone could manage on, and what a servant could manage on, were



quite unconnected in her mind. £25,000 a year was the realistic minimum for a salaried employee, but four pounds a month good pay by the standard of the working class. (It seems the differentials in Indonesia today are about the same as those in Britain of the 1840s.)

These days in this country, despite the attempts of the Thatcherites to restore Victorian values, there is an overlap of scales. The lowest 'salaries', even of fully-qualified salary earners, are lower than the highest 'wages'. But there is still a big difference in the averages, which accounts for the mindboggling sums paid to the salaried staffs of charities working for the poor.

At sociology lectures, in the technical teachers' training college, we encountered an entirely different idea of the working class. For controlling the behaviour of children, we were told, the middle class use 'rational control' (meaning explanations of why desired behaviour is a good idea), whereas the working class use 'positional control' (meaning you must obey your parents). And in conversation, the working class only use 'restricted code' (roughly, restricted to topics with which both parties are familiar), while the middle class also use 'elaborated code'.

The classifications were interesting, but the lesson was sidetracked by the unfamiliar use of the terms 'middle class' and 'working class'. We students were lecturers ourselves, in subjects like printing, cooking, engine-fitting, and gas-fitting; and while most of us would concede that lecturing is a middle-class job, we all thought ourselves working-class by origin. Yet 'rational control' and 'elaborated code' had been normal in all our working-class families.

The sociology lecturers would say only that they were using the term 'working class' in a 'precise, technical sense'. We had been given the name of a sociologist called Basil Bernstein, so a couple of us went to the library to look up Bernstein's definitions. He defined the 'working class' as those whose formal education or training stopped at compulsory school-leaving age; anyone who had served an apprenticeship, or attended evening classes, counted as 'middle class'. But this will not quite do, because we all know people of little or no formal education, who use elaborated code with aplomb. Evidently, the 'precise, technical sense' of 'working class' is really as follows: thick.

There was a time when people at university just assumed that people who worked with their hands were thick, and this assumption would have been reinforced by the deference of the poor towards the powerful. I have never known a mentally normal adult whose speech was limited to 'restricted code'; but I knew plenty of fellow conscripts in the army, who would be embarrassed to use 'elaborated code' in front of an officer.



George Orwell in the 1930s went to work in a cloth cap and boots, and told people he lived in the working-class borough of Islington (which he did, but in the posh enclave of Canonbury Square). Thus he made plain his admiration and sympathy for the working class, although as a salaried writer for the BBC, he could not claim to be working class himself.

Orwell would need no such modesty today. Revolutionaries are mostly articulate people, and since WW2 young articulate people in this country, whatever their class origins, have been able to escape from drudgery and penury into pleasant salaried jobs or self-employment. The revolutionaries who so escape continue to describe themselves as working class, partly through family pride and partly in response to the slogan, "only the working class can free the working class". This new usage allows people to describe themselves as 'working class' who have utterly no experience of the working class in the old sense: BBC writers, university professors, eminent actresses, in fact anyone who wishes to be included.

The usual definition proposed for this usage, is that the working class includes everyone who depends on their work for their income. Does this include the manager who gets £50,000 a year, but pays his servants four pounds a month? The answer is likely to be convoluted and verbose, but in essence, the manager counts as a member of the working class if he is a member of a 'working class' political grouping, but not if he is a member of the Conservative party.

As Orwell showed (and so did Marx, Engels, Bakunin, and Kropotkin), one need not be a victim of social injustice to advocate revolution against it. To pretend to be a member of the underprivileged class when one is not is confusing, not to say dishonest.

Nicolae Ceaucescu, the late Communist president of Romania, dismissed the ad hoc tribunal which sentenced him to death with the words, "You are just ordinary citizens. As President, I can only be tried by the National General Assembly and the working class". The image of the working class conducting a trial is as daft as "the people of this country should get round a table"; but that is not what Ceaucescu meant. He was using the term 'working class' as a metonym<sup>1</sup> for those who rule in the name of the working class (i.e., in Ceaucescu's case, Ceaucescu).

As another example of this usage, a recent pamphlet (whose title and publisher I forbear to mention since it has been withdrawn) presents a picture of a post-revolutionary society which more or less fits the anarchist ideal, with this addition: "Meanwhile the working class must

1. Editor's note: a word used in a transferred sense — Shorter OED.



continue to search out and eliminate pockets of bourgeois resistance, and to those who deplore the bloodshed which this would involve, we reply, there is no alternative". Visions of the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea, who abolished money and established workers' co-operatives, and protected this ideal society by systematically eliminating all who were affected by bourgeois education — except for themselves, of course.

In summary, I am acquainted with the working class in four quite distinct senses: first, as the class of people who work with their hands for wages; second, as the class of people who are assumed to be thick; third, as the class of people who like to describe themselves as working class; fourth, as a metonym for bosses and would-be bosses of a Marxist-Leninist or similar persuasion.

The 'working class' has become like 'freedom', a term which attracts support, but varies in meaning so much that it might mean almost anything. Like 'freedom', it is sometimes used to mislead an audience about the speaker's real intentions. Whenever I hear the expression 'working class', I release the safety catch of my rude noise machine.

Acknowledgement: the title of this article is lifted, with affectionate remembrance, from a talk by Bonar Thompson.





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Gary Pattison

## Anarchist Influences in the Durham Coalfield before 1914

There remains a great need to retrace British anarchist history outside the major groupings in London and the South-East. North-East England has a relatively strong tradition dating back to Kropotkin's visits to the area in the 1880s, the movement finally taking root in the more radical mining communities in the years before the First World War. The following is a brief account of the movement, though deeper research would certainly provide more positive results.

Under the editorship of the Radical MP Joseph Cowen, the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* published a series of articles by Kropotkin in 1881-1882. On 1 July 1882, Kropotkin spoke at the Durham Miners' Gala to a crowd said to be between 40,000 and 50,000, according to the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* (3 July), which acclaimed his speech as the leading event of the day. His account of the condition and resistance of miners in Russia and their willingness to follow the tactics employed by the Durham miners proved most popular. The following Monday evening he presented another lecture in a crowded lecture-room in Nelson Street, Newcastle, where he condemned the English press for its constant portrayal of the resistance to Tsarism as bloodthirsty nihilists. Kropotkin also chaired a series of smaller meetings in the Haymarket pub in Newcastle, as well as street meetings. It was from the North-East that Kropotkin drew some small encouragement before he gave up on England and returned to France in autumn 1882.

Following his return to Britain on his release from prison in 1886, Kropotkin gave a further lecture to an audience of about 4,000 at the Tyne Theatre in Westgate Road, Newcastle. Now he was able to go far beyond the plight of Russian miners, into explanations of his own anarchistic beliefs.

Nigel Todd in *Roses and Revolutionists* takes up the story with the formation of the Newcastle Anarchist Club in the 1890s, with vibrant agitation on both Tyneside and Wearside in 1893-1894 and open-air meetings on Sundays. The papers *Liberty*, *Freedom* and *Commonweal* were circulated through the mining communities, with meetings in Sunderland and the nearby pit village of Silksworth. By 1895 *Freedom* could list meetings in Sunderland, South Shields, Newcastle, Stanly and Gateshead. Under the influence of Kropotkin's newly published



book *The Conquest of Bread*, Franz Kapir (under the name of Frank Kapper) eventually set up the Clousden Hill colony at Forest Hall on the outskirts of Newcastle, after looking for sites around Sunderland and the mining village of Ryhope which for a while looked possible. Through the colony's contact with Joseph Cowen, Kropotkin was invited to be treasurer but declined, believing more in the value of propaganda.

This summary of early activity may be taken as the regional backdrop to the movement which was to start to take root in the pit villages from 1912. Clearly Kropotkin left an impression in the 'area. The Russian exile and secretary of the Newcastle group of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour party in 1904-1905 wrote on his admission to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in Newcastle:

One way and another, they were quite well informed about the state of affairs in Russia. They derived this information from the agitation which Peter Kropotkin had carried out throughout Britain. From what I heard from Englishmen in Newcastle, the English citizen Joseph Cowen helped Kropotkin after he had been imprisoned in Paris. Cowen went bail for him and gave him the chance to leave Paris and stay with him in his home. Cowen . . . founded the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* and its evening edition, the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*. he encouraged Kropotkin to write for them. Cowen also began to defend the interests of the local miners. (cited in the *Bulletin of the North East Labour Historical Society*, no. 22, 1988.)

The early years of this century saw a decline in the fortunes of the anarchist movement, and it was not until 1907 that there were signs of activity again in Newcastle and Sunderland. The Newcastle Anarchist Club was functioning again by 1909. A major new centre of activity was the village of Chopwell. A mine was sunk there in 1902, bringing a rapid inflow of new workers, and the area soon acquired a reputation for industrial militancy. Craig Marshall argues that this militant reputation was in turn to attract further militants to the area of Chopwell (MA thesis, 'Levels of Industrial Militancy and Political Radicalisation of the Durham Miners 1885-1914', Durham). This may hold more than a grain of truth. The Lawther family, who were to play a central part in events in the village, moved to Chopwell in 1906. They were a large Northumbrian family of longstanding radical descent from as far back as Chartist days. Will Lawther involved himself first with the Independent Labour Party (ILP), attending the 1906 or 1907 conference in Newcastle as a representative. By the printers' strike of 1910 he was involved in the production of a supportive sheet and *The Herald*. It was not until 1912, when he attended the Central Labour College in London, that he appears sympathetic to anarchist tendencies. He came into contact with many leading activists, and made friends with George



Davison, the American anarchist who made considerable wealth from his acquisition of a directorship in Kodak and used it to further his own political beliefs. Davison purchased premises in South Wales and Stockport and also a certain Matt Caisley's shop in Derwent Street, Chopwell, Co. Durham. The latter was very rapidly to become the centre of left-wing activity in the area. Although Andy Lawther states that activity had already existed in the surrounding villages, there is little evidence beyond fragmentary records relating to the ILP and the DeLeonist syndicalism of George Harvey in the Wardley area. It is nevertheless fair to assume that the anarchist influences brought by Lawther and Davison were felt beyond Chopwell.

The Club was used as a lecture theatre attracting many notable speakers, including Tom Mann and Jim Larkin. These public meetings were backed up by Plebs League classes. In 1912 a Workers Freedom Group was established on the same statement of objectives drafted by the leading anarchist George Ballard (Barrett) as was used by the Workers Freedom Groups set up around other properties purchased by Davison in the South Wales coalfield. This was established in Chopwell immediately upon Will Lawther's return. The group became highly active in May 1913. While Davison is known to have provided a small library and paid most of the overheads, Jack Lawther claimed that all of the early activists had their own 'marvellous libraries' and that they saw to it that not only the Communist Club, as it became known, but also the two working men's clubs and the colliery institute also had libraries, besides the Co-operative library which it is claimed was always well stocked with socialist publications.

It soon became possible to buy all kinds of left-wing publications in the village. Davison would distribute leaflets and sell pamphlets at meetings, but never spoke. His wealth may have alienated certain elements in the community, regardless of his cautious approach. Jack Parks, a former close associate of Will Lawther, certainly found this to be the case when Lawther returned with Davison from the Central Labour College. Nevertheless, Lawther and the Chopwell movement's sympathies are clearly recalled by one former resident: 'I'd met Will Lawther at the Durham Miners Gala and I was a Suffragette at the time, and we were both selling our papers, I don't know what he was selling, probably *The Anarchist* or something like that. They were anarchist, you know, in a quiet and peaceful sort of way' (Connie Lewcock).

Through the Club a strange collection of activists were drawn together, such as Harry Bolton, a Welsh Methodist preacher, and Vipond Milican Hardy, a devout atheist with a commitment to a totally free society who was claimed to have a better knowledge of the Bible



than anyone in the village. Other names that regularly appeared include Jack Gilliland, Harry Black and Matt Guthrage, all apparently very well-read, self-educated figures of the community.

Reflecting the Nonconformist religious tradition of the area, the Club also became central to the development of a Socialist Sunday School, where socialist principles were taught to both young and old in the community. The village's leading activists gave the lectures. It was founded by Harry Bolton, shocked at the acceptance of war within Christianity, using hymns written by Bruce Glasier of the ILP. Andy Lawther in his latter days still recalled the dedication: 'We desire to be just and loving to all our fellow men and women, to work together as brothers and sisters for peace and righteousness.' They also had an equivalent Ten Commandments, including such precepts as 'Remember that all the good things in life are produced by labour. Whoever enjoys them without working for them is stealing the blood of the workers'; 'Honour good men, be courteous to all men, bow down to none'; 'Look forward to the day when all men will be brothers and live together in peace and fellowship'. However, it is recorded that even Harry Bolton's daughter felt they lost out having only May Day as opposed to the conventional Sunday Schools which celebrated both Easter and Christmas.

A similar community-based approach was taken towards fortnight Summer Camps making them open to a mingling of several left perspectives. In 1914 the camp was by the sea, but in 1915 it had to be inland as a result of coastal security. The 1915 camp was attended by the Suffragette Bella Falkoner and John Harrison, the ILP secretary from the near-by village of Cornsey Colliery.

The 1914 Anarchist Conference in Newcastle, no doubt attended by members of the Chopwell movement, had on its agenda the linking up of anarchist groups throughout the country (*Freedom*, May 1914). It is at this point that the movement may be seen to be entering into a new potentially unified stage, only to be interrupted by the war. The war also drew developments in Chopwell rapidly to a close. Many of the left-wing elements in the village lost popularity as a result of their opposition to the war. Chopwell showed immense loyalty, with 500 volunteers of whom 200 were later killed in action. Even the Lawther family was to become ideologically split over the issue. Will Lawther took a pacifist stance in *The Spur* (December 1914) and involved himself along with his brothers Steve and Eddie in anti-war campaigning, while his brothers Bob and Joe were among the first to enlist in the village. In 1916 Eddie Lawther was sentenced to two years' hard labour by a Sunderland Court for conscientious objection, which he spent in Wormwood Scrubs. He was not without support, since the Tyneside Union



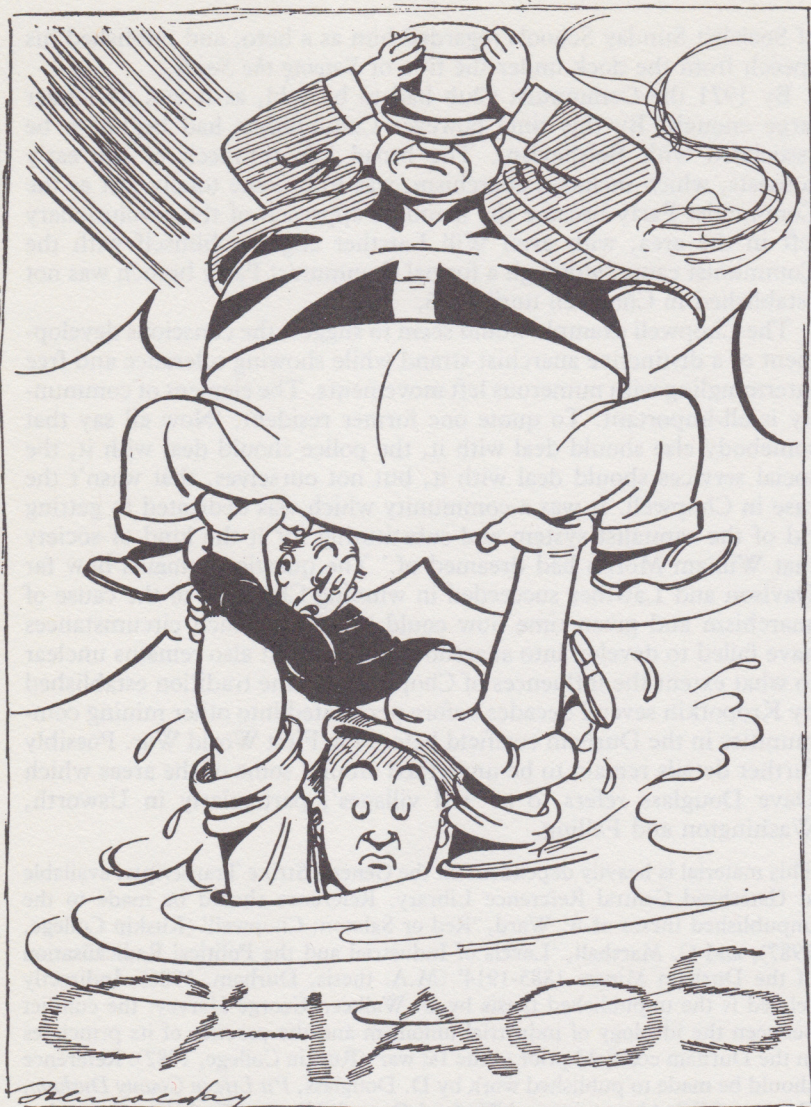
of Socialist Sunday Schools regarded him as a hero, and published his speech from the dock under the title of *Sowing the Seeds*.

By 1921 the Communist Club had to be sold, as it was no longer large enough. By this time however Communism had begun to be associated with Bolshevism. The broad left approach of the early activists, which included anarchism, was to become totally lost as the Communist Party became the mainline approach of the revolutionary left in the area, with even Will Lawther aligning himself with the Communist cause, although a formal Communist Party branch was not established in Chopwell until 1926.

The Chopwell example would seem to suggest the conscious development of a distinctive anarchist strand while showing tolerance and free intermingling with numerous left movements. The element of community is all-important. To quote one former resident: 'Now all say that somebody else should deal with it, the police should deal with it, the social services should deal with it, but not ourselves, that wasn't the case in Chopwell. It was a community which was dedicated to getting rid of the capitalist system and substituting for it the kind of society that William Morris had dreamed of.' The question remains how far Davison and Lawther succeeded in winning Chopwell to the cause of anarchism and given time how could this under such circumstances have failed to develop into anarchosyndicalism. It also remains unclear to what extent the influences of Chopwell and the tradition established by Kropotkin several decades before permeated into other mining communities in the Durham coalfield before the First World War. Possibly further details remain to be unearthed around some of the areas which Dave Douglass refers to as 'red villages', particularly in Usworth, Washington and Felling.

This material is heavily dependent on the General Strike Transcripts, available at Gateshead Central Reference Library. Reference should be made to the unpublished theses of A. Ward, 'Red or Salmon: Chopwell' (Ruskin College, 1987), and C. Marshall, 'Levels of Industrial and the Political Radicalisation of the Durham Miners 1885-1914' (M.A. thesis, Durham, 1986). Indirectly related is the unpublished thesis by G. Walker, 'George Harvey: the conflict between the ideology of industrial unionism and the practice of its principles in the Durham coalfield prior to the 1st war' (Ruskin College, 1982). Reference should be made to published work by D. Douglass, *Pit Life in County Durham, Rank and File Movements and Workers' Control* (History Workshop Pamphlet, 1972), notes from such also deposited in Newcastle Central Library); S. Macintyre, 'A Proletarian Science', on Davison; N. Todd, *Roses and Revolutionists* (Peoples Publications, 1986); and L. Turnbull, *Chopwell's Story* (Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council, 1978). Also Trade Films, Bottle Bank, Gateshead have a film on the Lawther family, which discusses and is partly shot in what was the Communist Club.





WILL HE SEE ME THROUGH?



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**R. W. Jones**

**Anti-Parliamentarism and Communism in  
Britain,  
1917-1921**

In this article I shall discuss the growing British anti-parliamentarist movement in the period immediately preceding the formation in 1921 of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation (APCF). In particular, I want to consider the attempts to unite the various anti-parliamentary groups into one Communist Party. These attempts were, I shall argue, a natural development of the revolutionary movement in Britain. They were cut short by the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), an unnatural development for Britain which was based on the conditions set by the Communist International in Russia. The subsequent formation of the APCF was, as a result, a pale reflection of what could have been.

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At the outset it is necessary to try to clarify what is meant by 'anti-parliamentarism'. It is important to realise that, for British comrades in 1921, anti-parliamentarism was not merely a negative delineation of tactics — a rejection of the policy of socialists standing for and sitting in Parliament — though this was obviously a key element of the movement. Anti-parliamentarism has, at this time, to be viewed in the context of a burgeoning communist movement. Indeed, until the formation of the CPGB, which took upon itself the definition of all things 'communist', it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that the anti-parliamentary and communist movements were synonymous. To be a communist before 1920, even 1921, was to be an anti-parliamentarian. Only after 1921 was the prefix 'anti-parliamentary' needed.

This was true of both Marxists and anarchists. Each shared a common set of ideas, including the centrality of the class struggle for social analysis and action; the conception of workers' committees and councils seizing the means of production and distribution; the ensuing creation of a Soviet Republic which initially would act as a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'; and, as a necessary corollary of these, the importance of direct action and anti-parliamentary agitation. While there was not unanimity on all of these points, there was a broad measure of agreement emerging.



One revealing example of this convergence of views was the interpretation which was made by most sections of the revolutionary movement in Britain of the Russian Revolution in sovietist and councilist terms rather than in terms of the determining role of a centralised and disciplined political party. This interpretation remained almost universal until 1920, when doubts about the exact nature and direction of the Russian Revolution began to surface in Britain. It is also significant that these doubts emerged not over the political practice of the Bolsheviks in Russia — which were rationalised away into existing theoretical formulas (though this was not true of the anarchists centred on the London Freedom Group) — but over the advice Lenin was giving to German and Italian communists to participate in parliamentary elections.

Completely absent was any notion of the centralised, disciplined party as the controlling agent of the revolution. This, however, was a key element in the Comintern's 'Twenty-One Conditions for Admission to the Communist International', which all Communist Parties had to accept before affiliation. Thus Point 12 declares that the party must be built 'upon the principle of democratic centralisation', and speaks of control by 'iron discipline'; and of a party central body with 'the most far-reaching faculties'.

The acceptance of the 'Twenty-One Conditions' by the CPGB therefore represented a marked break with past British experience. What was the significance of this? For some historians, such as James Hinton in *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (1973), the unity negotiations resulting in the formation of the CPGB represented a 'theoretical clarification'. Hinton charts a development of revolutionary theory from syndicalism and industrial unionism by way of the experience of the shop stewards' and workers' committee movement to the ultimate flowering of 'the soviet idea of revolution' in the CPGB. There is much that is wrong with this interpretation. Here it is necessary only to note the simple points that the CPGB did not embody any 'theoretical clarification', and had very little to do with 'the soviet idea of revolution'. The whole point of the unity negotiations was to set up Lenin's 'party of a new type' — that is, a centralised party loyally following the orders of the Comintern. Any theoretical or other discoveries made by the British participants were subsumed within this task. The end result was that the existing revolutionary movement and any theoretical advances it had made were largely destroyed.

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Let me examine this a little more closely. The first point to make about



the 1920 unity negotiations is that they did not involve discussions about the theoretical significance of soviet power or the meaning of the dictatorship of the proletariat. There was already a fair measure of agreement on these issues. The main, almost the exclusive, topic of discussion was parliamentarism, in the form of parliamentary action and of affiliation to the Labour Party. As I shall show later, almost the whole of the revolutionary movement was anti-parliamentary and was uniting around an anti-parliamentary platform. For the moment, however, let me assume this point, and examine how the incipient 'party of a new type' handled the question. In doing so we shall see how the path was laid for the destruction of the revolutionary movement in Britain.

What was the attitude of communists to the Labour Party? For anyone thinking in terms of communism (outside certain sections of the British Socialist Party and the Independent Labour Party), it was simply inconceivable to regard the Labour Party as having anything at all to contribute to the developing movement. Then, as now, the Labour Party, so far as any move towards socialism was concerned — and never mind about any move towards communism — was seen as a bad joke. D. Manion noted at the Communist Unity Convention of 31 July - 1 August 1920:

At the present time in Sheffield no matter how good a Socialist a man might be he was mobbed if at any Socialist or trade union meeting he said he was in favour of such [i.e. Labour Party] affiliation.

And Mrs Bamber from Liverpool added:

The industrial workers were sick to death of the position of the Labour Party at the present time, and she hoped that we, the Communist Party, showing the way not to reform but to the emancipation of the workers, would keep outside the Party that had done so much to delay the progress of the working class during the last few years.

If this was so obvious to so many people, why was Labour Party affiliation ever considered as a serious policy? One factor was that the BSP, the largest socialist body involved in the unity negotiations, was already affiliated to the Labour Party, and continued to argue for affiliation. But a growing number of BSPers, including Comrades Manion and Bamber, were starting to reject the policy. There were clearly other factors at work. The most important of these was the Comintern directive instructing the British Communist Party to affiliate, backed up by Lenin's rationalisation of the position in *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. While the directive was crucial, perhaps more important was the kind of argument used to support it — a strange kind of argument, new to the British movement



and indicative of the kind of reasoning that was to undermine the communist movement in Britain.

It could be argued that up to this time the main aim of British socialists and communists had been a simple one of trying to make socialists and increase the class consciousness of the working class. Questions about the mechanics of seizing power were not widely discussed, most people being content to rely on the ability of the working class to create its own organs of self-government in any revolutionary situation. Further, the Labour Party was to play no part in this process, simply because it was not socialist and because its actions had positively hampered the development towards socialism.

But such common-sense and seemingly obvious points were to come under attack from a new breed of 'realists' and 'hard-headed strategists', who were to play an important part in the unity negotiations. The common-sense view of the Labour Party now came to be seen as 'naive' and 'emotional'; one needed a longer-term tactical view.

The ultimate source of such a view was the Comintern and Lenin himself. *Left-Wing Communism* appeared just before the Unity Convention, and ably summarised the lectures and advice Lenin had been giving British Communists during the preceding months. In this work Lenin argued that 'revolution is impossible without a change in the views of the majority of the working class, and this change is brought about by the political experience of the masses, and never by propaganda alone'. Fair enough; but Lenin went on to insist that in consequence 'British Communists should participate in parliamentary action, that they should from within Parliament help the masses of workers to see the results of a Henderson and Snowden government in practice'. In this way it was hoped that the masses would very soon become disappointed with the Labour Party and would begin to support the Communists.

Unfortunately this sort of argument leads directly into the nightmarish world of the mechanistic and manipulative party politician. In Lenin's words again:

The strictest loyalty to the ideas of Communism must be combined with the ability to make all the necessary practical compromises, to manoeuvre, to make agreements, zigzags, retreats and so on, so as to accelerate the coming to power and subsequent loss of political power of the Hendersons . . . to accelerate their inevitable bankruptcy in practice, which will enlighten the masses in the spirit of our ideas, in the direction of Communism. . . .

Or, in his oft-quoted phrase, Communists would support the Labour Party 'in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man'.



A good example of these intellectual contortions at work in Britain comes from R. Page Arnot's intervention at the Unity Convention on the Labour Party affiliation issue. He readily agreed that 'we were all sick of the Labour Party', but he added that this didn't necessarily mean that leaving the Labour Party was 'the best tactic for the revolution'. Arnot, as befitted the new revolutionary tacticians, was thinking ten steps ahead, in terms of Communists in the Labour Party 'splitting off' and taking 'a very large number of the organised working class with us'. The essence of the new outlook was to look at matters 'as tactics in a military sense' — that is, to 'think the thing out coldly and clearly and get rid of emotion'. Those who did not have these requisite military skills and who simply pointed out that the Labour Party was hopelessly reactionary and would tar the Communist Party with the same brush were said to be using 'emotional arguments'.

In this manner, Communist policy ceased to be a matter of debate and discussion by the rank and file, based on the observable experience of the working class and its institutions. Instead, policy was now determined by long-term tactical perspectives from above — an ever-changing series of intellectual permutations and combinations known as the 'Party Line'. This, when coupled with a centralised party demanding absolute loyalty, ensured the speedy elimination of any ideas and practice developed from the class struggle by the pre-existing communist movement in Britain. If its members didn't conform to the tactical line, they were simply disregarded as 'naive' or 'emotional'. Edgar T. Whitehead noted the process at work at an early period of its operation:

I do like this word 'naive'. It clinches the argument. All logic falls flat before it. Anti-parliamentarians are so naive, in face of the mephistophelian astucity [sic] of these revolutionary parliamentarians.

(*The Spur*, November 1920)

There could be no direct answer to such charges of 'naivety', because the Communist Party had developed its own particular logic, impervious to any questioning from outside.

Anti-parliamentary communists became increasingly puzzled by the attitude of the 'Maiden Lane Communists' (the CPGB, with its office in Maiden Lane, London) to the parliamentary question. Whitehead voiced a question which was baffling many: 'Why do the Maiden Lane Communists want participation in Parliament so much that they would rather split the movement than forgo it?' Given that the propaganda value of electoral activity was not a serious difference with the anti-parliamentarians, and given the repudiation of Parliament by the organised Workshop Movement, what possible reason could there be



for wanting to pursue participation in Parliament at all costs? Whitehead concluded: 'It is almost inconceivable that Maiden Lane should have been so blind and mad as to cease to take into account these realities, and instead, sheep-like, to blunderingly follow a tactic dictated from Moscow. . . .'

But this is almost certainly what did happen. The increasing invective and abuse from Maiden Lane was part of what Lenin called the 'liquidation of "left" doctrinairism' — a necessary stage which the class-conscious vanguard (the Communist Party) had to pass through to establish its supremacy. There is no space to document this process further, though it may be seen in its most dramatic and pathetic form in the amazing intellectual somersaults of people like William Gallacher and J. T. Murphy, who were very effectively 'liquidated'. The unity negotiations were in fact a crucial phase in the 'liquidation of "left" doctrinairism' in Britain. Rather than attempting to unite the existing revolutionary groups in Britain — indeed the negotiations created more division than unity — the main aim was to create Lenin's party 'of a new type', a party strictly conforming to the Comintern's conditions and with little regard for the British situation. This, and its consequences, were clearly foreseen by the anti-parliamentarians at the very foundation of the CPGB. Thus Whitehead noted:

Maiden Lane must understand . . . it is Britain we are dealing with, and British Industrialists and Proletarians, British historical conditions, and British realities. Until Maiden Lane faces these facts, gains some backbone and grey matter of its own, and ceases to be merely a gramophone for the Moscow Records, we can do no other than build our own party, propagate our Soviet and Communist principles in accord with realities.

Unfortunately Maiden Lane was incapable of facing these facts and continued to play Moscow Records. The tragedy of this is that in the process a real possibility of unity was lost and indeed destroyed.

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What was this possibility? Put simply, it was the chance to bring about a unity of a number of anarchist and Marxist groups who had in common their support of the Russian Revolution and who were moving towards a common communist philosophy. If carried forward, there was a possibility of uniting once again the differing conceptions of Marx and Bakunin in a communist movement of great potential significance.

At the outset, it must be realised that long before the Russian Revolution there was a communist movement in Britain, and that after 1917 it was a rapidly developing and largely non-sectarian movement. A



good example of its nature on the eve of the Russian Revolution is given by Jim Griffiths in his description of the activities of the Communist Club at Ammanford in South Wales. Griffiths reports on a series of meetings held there in the early days of 1917:

The aim of these meetings has not been to propagate any particular brand of Socialism or Communism. They have aimed rather at providing a common platform — a workers' Forum — where all who are interested in social problems can meet, and freely and frankly exchange opinions on vital social questions, the members of the club being convinced that the providing of opportunities for such meetings is the greatest service they can render to the working class movement at the present time. If the movement is to survive the hard times ahead, it must cease wasting its energies in fruitless wrangles over this, that or the other policy. It must return to first principles. . . . We must aim at securing an intelligent class-conscious rank and file.

*(The Spur, April 1917)*

In this non-sectarian atmosphere socialists were beginning to forget their 'fruitless wrangles' and move towards a common conception. Thus within the anarchist movement there was a growing section of what Guy Aldred called 'Marxian anarchists' who were distinguished from other anarchists (especially 'Kropotkin anarchists') by their acceptance of the Marxist analysis of the state and their recognition of the importance of the class struggle. These anarchists were becoming increasingly impatient with those who, in the words of Freda Cohen of the Glasgow Anarchist Group, were merely content with 'fine phrases or poetical visioning'. What was needed, she continued, was 'knowledge . . . for the class struggle, by giving a scientific basis in place of a sentimental belief' (*The Spur*, January/February 1918). She concluded that 'knowledge of economics, history and sociology are of primary importance', and that due recognition should be given to the fact that 'industrial unionism, IWGBism [the Industrial Workers of Great Britain], the Shop Steward movement, etc., are questions that concern the daily life of the worker . . . [and] are coming more and more to the fore. We must discuss them thoroughly and define our attitude towards them.'

These were also the concerns of many members of the Socialist Labour Party and left-wing members of the British Socialist Party and the Independent Labour Party. Workers in these socialist groups were beginning to share a common literature and to exchange views and debate the key issues raised by the political and industrial struggles of the moment. For example, James Morton of the London Industrial Workers' Committee took part in a debate with the SLP in 1917 on direct action, and ordered six dozen copies of J. Blair Smith's anarchist



pamphlet *Direct Action versus Legislation* for distribution at this and other meetings.

Rank-and-file members of socialist bodies were starting to question the established political shibboleths of their particular groups. SLPers, for instance, started to query the DeLeonist attitude to parliamentary action — some, like Joseph Linden, leaving the SLP to join the anarchists. Within the anarchists, too, there was dissent. Robert Selkirk, an anarchist from Cowdenbeath, questioned Aldred's rejection of the workshop struggle: 'It is as well to speed the day when "the Socialist organisations will cease to be glorified debating clubs and become fighting units". And this can be done in the despised "workshop struggle"' (quoted by Aldred, *The Spur*, June 1919). A number of anti-parliamentarians and anarchists (such as Whitehead and R. M. Fox) accepted the importance of the 'workshop struggle' at this time, and thus came close to the position of dissident SLPers and socialist militants in the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee movement.

The important point is that these questions were a matter for debate and discussion within a developing anti-parliamentary movement. Thus, on the 'workshop struggle', for example, Aldred was to make a speedy and effective reply to such palliative fights for 'petty ends', as he viewed them, in his debate with T. L. Smith of the Workers International Industrial Union (WIIU) (*The Spur*, August 1919). There were other fierce arguments between collectivists and communists, between those who were for or against action in the workshop, and between others on the precise nature of the anti-parliamentary attitude to the ballot-box. Such arguments, however, were 'becoming less real', as Aldred had noted, with a 'growing tendency of socialists to accept a common theory and to meet on a common democratic footing' (*The Spur*, March-April 1919). Moreover, this tendency was 'a natural growth, capable, truly, of extensive and intensive cultivation; but still a vital development from within a movement'. But Aldred was well aware of 'a hypocritical parade of unity' by those whose 'desire is not for unity, but for capture'. Such a 'mechanical inspiration from without', as he described it, would destroy the natural growth within the movement towards unity — and this is precisely what happened at the Unity Convention.

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But what happened in the intervening years? A number of important initiatives were made in the period from 1918 to 1920 to articulate the



approaching unity in organisational terms. I shall briefly examine two of these initiatives — the formation of the Communist League, and the formation of the Labour Abstentionist Party, both in 1919.

The more important of the two, the Communist League, was an attempt to unite dissident branches of the SLP with London anarchists centred on the *Spur* and *Freedom* papers. From it came the first paper in Britain to be called *The Communist*, and also — and more significantly — a real attempt to unite Marxists and anarchists in one organisation. The first step towards the new group came from the London District Council of the SLP, which in February 1919 issued a proposal to convene a conference for rank and file members of the British socialist movement to discover a basis for communist unity. The proposal was accompanied by a lengthy manifesto which included a draft constitution for a new Communist League. Key elements in the constitution were: a call for local workers' committees and councils to aim at seizing the means of production and creating a proletarian dictatorship; the ultimate aim of a republic of federated communes; and a declaration that the parliamentary vote is obsolete and that direct industrial action should be adopted as an alternative.

The unity conference was held on 16 March 1919, and the Communist League was established on an explicitly anti-parliamentary programme. George Rose well expressed the spirit behind the new movement in the first issue of its paper *The Communist*:

We know that there must develop the great working-class anti-Statist movement, showing the way to Communist society. The Communist League is the standard bearer of the movement; and all the hosts of Communists in the various other Socialist organisations will in good time see that Parliamentary action will lead them, not to Communism but to that bureaucratic Statism correctly named by Hilaire Belloc the 'Servile State'. . . . Therefore, we identify ourselves with the Third International, with the Communism of Marx, and with that personification of the spirit of revolt, Bakunin, of whom the Third International is but the natural and logical outcome. (May 1919)

The essence of the new movement was thus an attempted fusion of Bakuninism and Marxism in an anti-parliamentary movement working for the creation of revolutionary workers' councils and factory committees.

Over the next few months the League developed and expanded. An attempt was also made to unite with the Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF), but the WSF had its own plans. While most branches of the League were to be found in Scotland and London, William Mainwaring announced the formation of a Treherbert branch in South Wales in May. Mainwaring, however, did reject the League's constitution on a couple of details, including the interesting point that it was nonsense to



speak of the parliamentary vote as 'obsolete' because 'to say it is obsolete will lead many to suppose that it once was useful. To this we do not agree.' (*The Communist*, June/July 1919.)

Reports in *Freedom* cast light on developments in London and the influence of the League on anarchists there. A generally favourable report on the initial unity conference, while noting that the League was not an anarchist organisation, recognised that 'the repudiation of Parliament is a long step in our direction' (April 1919). But subsequent issues carried an acrimonious exchange between William Hopkins of the Stockport Workers' Anarchist Group and David Bloom of the Stepney Branch of the Communist League, concerning seemingly irreconcilable differences over a communist dictatorship and economic determinism, among other matters (June, July, October 1919).

The prominence given to this ill-tempered debate should not obscure the progress being made towards unity in London. Among a section of London anarchists there was a desire for action to prepare the way for an expected revolution and an impatience with the primarily literary propaganda of the Freedom Group, as exemplified in 1919 by the appearance of a new Anarchist Propaganda Group. To these anarchists the best chance of the desired kind of action seemed to lie in cooperation with the Communist League. Thus at a Conference of London Anarchists in April 1919 it was argued by some comrades that 'the time had arrived for action' (May 1919):

The anti-parliamentary attitude of many Socialists and Communists was greatly due to our propaganda in the past, and good results would undoubtedly follow if we worked with them. Steps, therefore, are to be taken towards holding a Conference with the Communist League to consider a joint plan of campaign.

The resulting conference, held in June 1919, was not without points of dispute, including the vexed question of the nature of any proletarian dictatorship. But, significantly, the discussion was 'very friendly in tone, the desire on both sides being to find points of agreement rather than points of controversy' (July 1919). Finally, it was hoped that the points at issue could be resolved at a future National Conference to which anarchist groups would be invited.

Possibly in response to anarchist criticisms, a novel feature of the League was its attempt to create a decentralised ruling body called the Local Delegates' Committee. This embodied the principle of an elected delegate committee (each branch electing delegates in proportion to its membership), with mandated delegates subject to immediate reporting back and instant recall if they failed to follow their mandates. The aim here was to sweep out 'boss domination and cliqueism' (*The Communist*, August 1919): 'It must be a movement of the rank and file, expressing



itself to the rank and file.' A real test of this new ruling body in practice was to be the first national conference of the movement. It is not clear, however, whether the conference ever took place, for the Communist League seems to have disappeared without a trace at the end of 1919 or the beginning of 1920.

This, though, was not the end of attempts to find a basis for unity between anarchists and Marxists. Aldred in particular continued to pursue closer relations with SLP, BSP and ILP comrades. In an important article Aldred again spoke of the revolutionary movement 'drawing closer and closer together on a platform of practical revolutionary effort' ('Bricks and mortar', *The Spur*, October 1919). There was now common agreement that the Soviet Republic could not be established by parliamentary action, but there was still considerable division over the question of the precise usefulness of parliamentary action.

To overcome this division, and particularly addressing SLPers, Aldred proposed the 'Sinn Fein' tactic — communist anti-parliamentary candidates adopting the Irish Nationalists' use of the ballot-box for agitational purposes, with a pledge not to take the oath and not to sit in Parliament if elected. While preferring the straight anti-parliamentary position of boycotting elections, Aldred put forward the 'Sinn Fein' alternative as 'a tactical compromise . . . for effecting a wider unity'.

The tactic was put to the test in the Paisley by-election of 1919-1920, when Aldred offered to support the SLP candidate if he stood as a communist anti-parliamentarian. The offer no doubt had some effect on the local SLP branch, for when William Paul declined to stand as their candidate, they decided to forget all compromise and conducted a 'Boycott the Ballot Box' campaign aimed particularly at the Labour Party candidate, Biggar. Their leaflet concluded: 'Every vote withheld is a vote for socialism. . . . Abstain from voting. Work for the social revolution.' (Quoted by D. M. Chewter. *The History of the Socialist Labour Party of Great Britain*. B Litt thesis, Oxford 1965.)

Such action was perhaps indicative of a growing unease in the ranks of the SLP with the parliamentary policy of the party. Although quite a lot is known about the activities of SLP dissidents like Paul and Tom Bell, who were to form the Communist Unity Group of the SLP, very little is known about the developing anti-parliamentarism in the party as exemplified by the Paisley action. There is evidence that other SLP branches were accepting the anti-parliamentary position. For example, we know that Aldred was running a mission in 1919-1920 under the auspices of the Shettleston SLP which, in the words of its secretary J. Bowman, was to 'thump home that anti-parliamentary truth' (*The Spur*,



March 1920). Realising that 'this is not the SLP position', Bowman insisted however that 'there must be no parliamentary sidestepping'. This attitude to Parliament also surfaced at the Carlisle conference of the SLP in April 1920, which spent an unusual amount of time discussing the case for and against parliamentary action.

Similar developments were taking place in branches of the BSP — for example in Scotland at the Tradeston and Anderston branches — and in ILP branches too. The rank and file of these parties were getting impatient with the traditional party arguments for parliamentary inaction, and were beginning to cooperate with individuals across party lines in practical propaganda. Individuals and branches were moving towards communist unity on their own initiative, independently of party leaders. Thus in May 1920 a Communist Group was formed in Paisley of ex-BSP members, while in June 1920 J. E. Scott announced the formation of the Acton Communist Party by discontented members of the Acton and Chiswick branch of the Herald League. The parliamentary constraints of the old parties and organisations were now hampering revolutionary propaganda, as Scott noted: 'We have stood always for the Revolution and the extreme propaganda but could not carry on whilst affiliated to the National Labour Party through no fault of our own' (*The Spur*, July 1920).

It was also at this time, in May 1920, that the Labour Abstentionist Party made its brief appearance. It was essentially the creation of Whitehead of the WSF. Its programme was largely a summary of the anti-parliamentary 'Sinn Fein' tactic as evolved by Aldred in the 1918-1919 period, but spiced with Whitehead's distinctive conception of independent proletarian ideology. Although it is not clear how much support the party could command, it did at least have the unqualified approval of Tom Mann, who wrote a foreword to Whitehead's pamphlet *The Labour Abstentionist Party* (1920), commending 'the fine tactics of the Irish Sinn Feiners', and desired 'to see the same tactics resorted to in Britain'. The formation of the party is thus another indication of the growing anti-parliamentarism in the movement.

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Within a few months of these developments, however, hopes of a rapprochement between Marxists and anarchists were dealt a fatal blow by the Communist Unity Convention. I have already shown how the ensuing Communist Party, based on the ludicrous programme of participation in parliamentary elections and affiliation to the Labour Party, was completely out of step with the evolution of the



revolutionary movement in Britain at this time. But why didn't this evolution continue independently of the new party? This is a very difficult question to answer. One historian, Walter Kendall in *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900-1921* (1969), has argued that the secret hand of Moscow gold was at work, which, in creating a situation of financial dependency for the small revolutionary groups, slowly but surely ensured that they were all sucked into the CPGB. There may be some truth in this, but the process was a little more complex.

It is clear that after the formation of the CPGB in August 1920 the new party was subject to a Comintern directive to unite with other selected revolutionary groups on the basis of the 'Twenty-One Conditions'. As a result, any further negotiations towards unity on an anti-parliamentary programme were a non-starter. But why didn't these other groups create their own initiative independently of Moscow? Unfortunately, they couldn't ignore Moscow and the CPGB, especially because most of them — including the SLP, the WSF, and the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement — were on the Comintern's hit-list. What is surprising, though, is that in the subsequent negotiations most of the revolutionary groups gave up their allegiance to their anti-parliamentary principles without much of a fight.

There was a fair amount of Comintern trickery in these negotiations through their British stooges. Most notable here, perhaps, was William Gallacher in his notorious attempts to discredit the leading Scottish Marxist John Maclean in the eyes of the SLP executive committee and his machinations in relation to the Communist Labour Party (which under his guidance became a conduit to funnel Scottish communists into the CPGB). But, despite Gallacher & Co., we must note that members of the various organisations were willing accomplices in this trickery and the intellectual somersaults it involved. As happens repeatedly in the history of British socialism in the twentieth century, there was a complete abdication of critical judgement when basic principles and beliefs are put to the test by supposed friends and allies.

Thus the British Communists were a push-over when faced with the simplistic and ludicrous arguments that the Russian Revolution depended on a united revolutionary movement in Britain and that, towards this end, Lenin and the Russian Bolsheviks knew best about tactics since they had already created a successful revolution. If there were any doubts, they could be rationalised away by fondly imagining that one could work for a change in policy from within the CPGB and/or the Comintern. The Scottish Communists accepted this latter



nonsense from Gallacher, and many others were to find themselves on the same slippery slope. In most cases intelligent people simply rejected their own revolutionary traditions and experience for the sake of a collective delusion — loyalty to the Party.

A good example of the process at work may be found in the political trajectory of Whitehead in the latter half of 1920. He was closely involved in attempts at unity among the anti-parliamentarian groups after the Unity Convention, including a proposed conference in September 1920 to bring together revolutionaries associated with the *Spur*, *Worker* and *Solidarity* papers. The 'anti-Labour Party and anti-parliamentary in tactic' nature of such revolutionaries was stressed. Later Whitehead wrote a series of uncompromising anti-parliamentary articles in *The Spur*. Thus in October 1920 he said:

None more than ourselves desire complete unity for action throughout the whole of the parties inside the Moscow International, but it has got to be a unity on an *effective* tactic. With the salt of the proletariat instinctively opposed to Parliamentarianism it is impossible to march forward along a parliamentary road.

And he repeated the argument with increasing eloquence in November in his discussion of 'Maiden Lane sophistries'. The sophistry to which he devoted particular attention was the current nonsense of 'revolutionary parliamentarianism'. For him 'Parliamentarianism means talk', and "revolutionary parliamentarianism" [means] revolutionary talk! Or, from another perspective: 'It is on the industrial field where Communists must be busy, there and everywhere where there are workers. There are no workers in Parliament. Get out of it!'

But by the following month, all had suddenly changed. In December 1920, at the Cardiff conference of the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International), Whitehead and others voted overwhelmingly in favour of acceptance of the Comintern's 'Twenty-One Conditions', including Point 11 in favour of parliamentary action. This amazing turn-around was justified, Whitehead explained, by the relative insignificance of British theoretical concerns in the face of demands for 'loye'ty to the world revolution'. From then on he was to become a vigorous champion of the new CPGB and the Comintern.

Many other comrades followed a similar path; Henry Sara and Robert Selkirk are two who spring to mind. This kind of transformation was not limited to Britain; a similar process occurred in the United States, for example, with Robert Minor being a particularly famous and influential instance. The same kind of arguments were used; Minor stressed loyalty to the revolution, and suggested that the anarchists could act as the left wing of the Communist Party!



Most of these recruits subsequently left the CPGB within a few years, thoroughly disillusioned (though some, like Selkirk, remained in it). Sara, for example, was one of the founders of the British Trotskyist movement; but more common was the experience of Whitehead, who joined the Labour Party and became a vigorous anti-Communist propagandist. This was the fate of many good comrades, and it is too easy, as James Klugmann shows in his official *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* (Volume 1, 1968), to dismiss them as opportunists and revolutionary dilettantes of no importance to the movement. But if anti-parliamentarism and real communism are ever again to have any importance, it is a trajectory which must be probed and understood beyond such convenient insults.

One contribution to such an understanding might, it could be argued, be the lack of any critical information about Lenin and the Russian Revolution in the British socialist press. This may have been true at an earlier period, but when decisions were being made to join the CPGB critical articles about Bolshevik policies were already beginning to appear. In *The Spur*, for example, a series of articles by the Austrian anarchist Rudolf Grossmann (Pierre Ramus) appeared from September 1919 onwards lambasting Lenin and the Bolshevik government. At first these articles were greeted with hostile disbelief by Aldred and others, but as Aldred in particular gained more information he came to similar conclusions. Aldred, however, was an exception in conducting such uninhibited intellectual inquiry. For most people, it seemed that nothing could get through the mind-block of the 'unity at all costs' school.

It was not long before the attitudes of this school became frozen into immovable dogma. After the formation of the CPGB, you criticised Lenin and other Communist leaders at your peril. Thus, because of his criticisms of Lenin and Gallacher, Aldred suddenly found that his lecture engagements with the Greenock Workers' Committee and the Paisley BSP were cancelled, and that halls booked for meetings were no longer available (*The Spur*, August 1920). In this manner the openness of the movement, with its free discussion and debate, crumbled away after mid-1920 in the pursuit of unity with the CPGB.

Such developments also affected the SLP. Individual SLPer were joining the CPGB, especially in Scotland via the CLP (John S. Clarke being one notable example). The SLP, because of this loss and the effects of unemployment, was declining in numbers at a rapid rate. To stem this decline the remaining members closed ranks and reverted to an undiluted DeLeonist position, leaving little scope for any development in an anti-parliamentary direction.





As a result of such retreats and the consolidation of the CPGB, what was left of the evolving revolutionary and anti-parliamentary movement came to be centred on *The Spur* and Guy Aldred. He and his associates were now almost alone in both being enthusiastic supporters of the Bolshevik Revolution and yet not falling for the spurious unity line of the CPGB. All that could be accomplished now was to bring together the few remaining Communist and anarchist groups which still adhered to an anti-parliamentary programme.

It was hoped to create a Communist federation out of these remaining groups. The principle of federation — a federation of Communist groups developed voluntarily from below rather than an imposed centralisation from above — was always an important and consistent part of the anti-parliamentary movement's proposals for unity. Aldred summarised the position in *The Spur*:

I have no objections to an efficient and centralised party so long as the authority rests in the hands of the rank and file and all officials can be sacked at a moment's notice. But I want the centralism to be wished for and evolved by the local groups and not imposed on them from a centre. . . . The Communist party, the real party, must be evolved through a federation of local groups, a slow merging of them into one party, from the bottom upwards, as distinct from this imposition from the top downwards. (August 1920)

The idea of federation was coupled with a demand for self-determination — the British revolutionaries should determine their own policy in relation to British conditions, irrespective of what Lenin and the Bolsheviks might say. Lenin was faced with different circumstances, Aldred argued, and might be forced to compromise to save the Russian Revolution, but in Britain there was no such excuse for compromise:

Lenin's task compels him to compromise with all the elect of bourgeois society whereas ours demands no compromise. And so we take different paths and are only on the most distant speaking terms.

Or, more directly, we should stop 'chasing the shadows of the great man [Lenin]. . . . It is not he who is running the British Revolution, but "ourselves alone". The policy of looking to him to mind our business is hindering and not helping the revolution.' But increasingly such advice from Aldred and a few others was ignored, as the move to join the CPGB gathered pace.

In practical terms, however, little progress was being made towards the federation that Aldred and the anti-parliamentary communists wished to see. Early in 1920 the Glasgow Anarchist Group issued a manifesto and put forward a proposal for unity along federalist lines (*The Spur*, January/February 1920). The group hoped to form a



communist federation for Lanarkshire akin to the already existing Fife Socialist League. A similar federation of communist groups was planned in Wales towards the end of 1920. But apparently such plans remained at the proposal stage.

The Leeds Unity Convention of January 1921 — with the final fusion of the CPGB with the Communist Labour Party and the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International), on the basis of the Comintern's 'Twenty-One conditions' — dashed any remaining hopes of a wider unity of anti-parliamentary groups. At this time, Aldred appealed to the example of the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD) as a party which had stood up to the Comintern on the question of parliamentarism. The KAPD had forced the Comintern to recognise it as a sympathising party with consultative status. If anti-parliamentary groups could unite in Britain into a National Federation or Party, they could then enter into a close alliance with the KAPD and other continental Communist Parties to form an International Anti-Parliamentary Federation. In this way Moscow would be forced to recognise the reality of anti-parliamentary organisation and be compelled to grant anti-parliamentary groups some form of representation on the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

But no one was listening any longer. Shortly afterwards, the KAPD was to get its 'marching orders' from Moscow — join the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) within three months, or else! Clearly the anti-parliamentary groups had no future inside the Comintern, and all hopes of this were now dropped. (It should perhaps be noted that Rose Witcop travelled to Moscow later in 1921 with APCF credentials to negotiate for 'associate membership' of the Comintern; ultimately nothing came of this, and it appears to have been her own initiative to gain financial support for the movement.)

Finally, at the 1921 Easter Conference of the Scottish anti-parliamentary groups, a Scottish Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation was formed. This was the beginning of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation which was to play a major part in keeping alive the hopes of a libertarian communism for the next thirty years.





WHY DON'T YOU SHAKE THEM OFF?



## Johnny Yen

### Social Thought and Ideology

#### Introduction: Free Will or Determinism?

The free will/determinism debate is one that has long haunted social thought. Note for example the discrepancy between the increasing abilities of biologists and psychologists to predict the parameters of human behaviour, and the arguments of existentialists and phenomenologists who believe that we *choose* our actions on the basis of the meanings we give to objects and situations. It may well be true that since human beings are biological organisms we are part of an evolutionary process which is largely beyond our control. But to contend that thought and therefore reasoning is 'genetically determined' is true only developmentally or tautologically, since a certain minimum number of braincells is required for reasoning to occur. Through biology, therefore, we have *transcended* biology. As Hegel said, an increase in complexity may constitute a difference in kind.

Yet are deterministic explanations completely 'wrong' when they point to the influence of socialisation and the situation, for example, in constraining our behaviour? Perhaps they are merely incomplete; accounts of individual or social behaviour solely in terms of such factors neglect the quality of human consciousness, which may be intentionally 'perverse'. Simply to know what is expected of us may make us think again about our actions and 'do ourselves' differently. Philosophy itself provides an illustration of the contradiction between the viewpoints of simple determinism and free will. In looking at the work of the 'great philosophers', a historical perspective is useful. Many, observing the behaviour of their neighbours, argued that people are naturally wicked and that legal constraint is necessary. Plato, for example, lived in the city state of Athens, which was constantly under attack from other city states. A philosopher himself, he advocated a ruling elite of philosopher kings administering a totalitarian state. Hobbes too argued for a strong state to curb 'man's natural aggressive instincts', while more modern thinkers such as Rousseau suggest types of 'social contract' to protect us from ourselves. Hegel went further and reasoned that 'whatever is, is rational'. He saw wars not only as inevitable, but as a good thing since



they are necessary for the 'spiritual progress' of humanity (everything being part of the historical dialectic).

The above thinkers have in common several characteristics, including the privileged background necessary for the education from which their cogitations derive, and the fact that they each constructed ingenious arguments either to justify the status quo or to increase the power of a ruling élite.

In arguing that their thought is somewhat determined by their class background and milieu I am taking a position rather like that of Marx who claimed that 'the ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas'. But Marx himself demonstrates that this is not the absolute rule, as do the examples of Bakunin, Kropotkin and many others. All belonged to dominant classes yet *through* thought were able to transcend the concepts of their culture. If cultural determinism were such a powerful force as some would contend, there would be no new ideas, no forces for change, no revolutions. In fact, though many of the 'great philosophers' have been conservative or reactionary in political outlook, at least some of their ideas have been original and in a sense revolutionary.

Clearly since there is much evidence both for the many types of determinism that influence a person's emotion, thought and action, and for the contrary position (i.e. that we may — through reasoning or insight — choose to do other than that ordained by natural or social law) both positions must hold some truth, though neither can claim to be absolute. It is beyond the scope of this essay to establish which is 'more correct'; I believe that *both* should always be borne in mind. What interests me more is the possible reasons behind and the possible effects of a point of view that emphasises either free will or determinism to the detriment of its opposite.

There must be few truly disinterested philosophers and scientists, since absolute objectivity is an ideal rather than a feasible reality. The logical conclusion of much social thought is policy ideas; we all of us are a part of the world we think about and study, and the conclusions we come to may have direct consequences on our lives; in fact for many the whole point of philosophy and science is to change the world. As Heisenberg has said, the scientist must take responsibility for his work, since the product of his research may be used either constructively or destructively. Social thinkers and scientists have in common the fact that it is their values that ultimately decide the subject matter they choose to discuss or study, their sources of data, methods, applications of findings and the emphasis they give to one aspect or another. The subject of this essay, then, is the emphasis given by philosophers and



social scientists to aspects of free will or determinism, and what these points of view may imply.

### Part I: Determinism as Ideology

There are several definitions of the word 'ideology'. For the purposes of this essay, ideology will be defined as a set of ideas, doctrines or principles put forward as though they are in everyone's interest, when they only serve the interests of a certain group. People advocating such a doctrine may not actually be aware that they are doing so (i.e. they may sincerely believe that they are acting in the general interest) and it would be presumptuous of me always to know whether a person believes their own ideology or not. Further, a genuinely egalitarian Weltanschauung might be élitist in its consequences (state socialism may be an example of this). However, in many cases, it will be clear to the reader when a philosophy is known to be serving the purposes of a dominant group by the person advocating it.

As was said in the introduction, the concept of determinism has a long history. A popular model of the history of ideas is that of the religious, philosophical (metaphysical) and scientific paradigms. This 'progress' of human knowledge was suggested by Auguste Comte in the nineteenth century. The debate about whether science has replaced religion or whether people have become more or less 'demystified' is not the issue here. What is of interest is that Comte and others saw science as the key to truth in human affairs.

His very model illustrates his perspective, for it suggests a linear (and *inevitable*) progress, over and above human intention (eg. to mystify others). Impressed by the successes of workers in the field of biology, chemistry and physics, he sought, by advocating that their logic and methods be applied to the study of human social life, to demonstrate that societies are subject to the same laws that govern the subject matter of the natural sciences; laws of *cause and effect* (i.e. a given cause always produces a given effect, all other factors being equal). Both Marx and the more conservative followers of Comte were interested in the example of the French Revolution and wished to make sense of it by seeking the social patterns — above individual attention — that lay behind it. Thus Comte advocated *positivism*, the view that natural scientific methods (i.e. methods which attempt to isolate variables so as to establish causal relationships) are the only way to establish the truth about human society.

The irony is that the 'founding fathers' of sociology, though



complementing each other in some respects, ultimately arrived at differing 'truths', and radically differing policies consequently. Yet each considered himself to hold a scientific Weltanschauung, and to be objective.

The views of some Marxists are of interest on the question of this approach to knowledge. Marx himself, though he believed his socialism to be scientific, felt that positivism was inappropriate for the study of human beings; he believed that the true underlying processes (social relations) determining human behaviour are not in themselves visible to inspection, but must be inferred (realism). A latter-day Marxist, Jurgen Habermas, makes a more acute criticism of certain tendencies in the positivist approach; he argues that opinion surveys (a popular positivist method, since it yields quantitative data) are inadequate since they do not generally ask *why* people hold such opinions. Going further, he contends that positivism in social science is associated with the requirement to control society. Indeed, control is the central element in the natural scientific method par excellence (the laboratory experiment), as well as being one of the essential purposes of scientific findings. Not only does the natural scientist wish to explain nature and predict future events, s/he also wishes to *control* them (often for purposes of profit).

Habermas's comments are particularly pertinent to the Behaviourist approach to psychology. Psychology, like all modern science, grew out of the principles of empiricism (the view that only knowledge 'arriving' via the senses is true). Behaviourism, particularly the brands advocated by John Watson and B. F. Skinner, is perhaps the most extreme manifestation of this perspective in social science; John Watson denied the existence of such 'ghosts' as mind, superego etc., and Skinner argues that psychology should dispose of all theories. The focus is simply on *observable behaviour*: stimuli and responses; and the sole purpose is to be able to predict and control.

With the rise of cognitive and humanistic psychology, the Behaviourist vision of 'man as no more than the sum total of his behaviours' is declining in popularity. Yet it is still a widely practiced approach to mental illness in the NHS (being extremely cost effective). Of wider social implication, possibly, is its part in political ideology. Skinner (in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, 1971) makes it quite clear that he believes free will to be no more than an illusion; indeed, based on his experiments (on rats and pigeons) he has extended Behaviourist cause and effect explanations to most fields of human activity. He argues that we should abandon our false beliefs in autonomy and accept the inevitability of control. The imaginary utopia he describes in his 1948 novel *Walden Two* is a society in which all behaviour is directed towards



'socially desirable' ends exclusively through the use of positive reinforcement (conditioning via reward). Skinner urges psychologists to take a greater role in the political process to this end, which in effect would be a totalitarian society. The partiality of Skinner's perspective becomes clear when one realises that the powerful minority controlling this process (deciding what is 'socially desirable') must, by coming to such decisions, be exercising a certain amount of free will, in the same way as Skinner himself does when he decides to condition pigeons to play table-tennis.

Lest it be thought that the views of a rather extreme scientist are nothing more than that in relation to what is happening now, one need look no further than the factory floor where Behaviourist principles have been applied for decades. 'Scientific Management' was pioneered by Frederick W. Taylor, who argued that financial reward is the worker's only consideration (though he suggested that workers should not be paid a higher rate than absolutely necessary). In my view, the description of Taylorism as 'science' is valid only in so far as science has largely departed from its origins in pure philosophy and become, since its harnessing by capital and state, mere technological research. In his investigation of the processes of the factory floor, Taylor began by asking how production could become more efficient; he defined the problem from the point of view of management and capital, rather than from the perspective of the majority of those involved, i.e. the workers.

The fundamental principle of Taylor's 'Scientific Management' is that control should be increasingly removed from the shopfloor and centralised; thus planning was separated from doing, so that unskilled (cheap) workers could be employed rather than craftsmen. To prevent unnecessary (unprofitable) social contact and walking about, conveyor belts were introduced; the worker was seen as no more than an extension of the machine.

Even within capitalist social science, Taylorism has had its critics. Elton Mayo's 'Human Relations' model stressed the *social* factors involved in the production process. Unilever, for example, pay poorly but have such 'social attractions' as hairdressers operating in worktime and on work premises.

One of the more elaborate critiques of Taylorism comes from the American Marxist Harry Braverman. He analyses Scientific Management as part of the general process of 'deskilling' which is itself a symptom of polarisation (i.e. Marx's prediction that the working class would become larger and poorer, and the bourgeoisie smaller and richer). But Braverman too, like the dialectical theory itself, is open to criticisms of historicism and determinism. Like other, more extreme, representatives of this particularly pessimistic strand of Marxism



(discussed in detail further on) he overlooks the ability of workers to resist 'inevitably increasing' management control (by strikes etc.).

That Mayo's more 'humane' form of industrial management has proved popular among multinationals is evidence that the man-machine vision of Taylorism isn't always workable, being too lonely and monotonous. Today's capitalist often favours a more paternalistic approach than in earlier times, recognising that it is generally easier to exploit workers using 'kindly interest' than machine-psychology.

Psychology, as a science, must concentrate on the processes that influence human behaviour and experience. In itself, psychology need not be part of a deterministic ideology, since it is a general level of study with no one perspective dominant. But, as we have seen with Skinner, there are those who, in their zeal to demonstrate the usefulness of a particular perspective, attempt to apply it to all aspects of human life to the detriment of other factors.

Behaviourism is not the only example of a psychological paradigm that may be ideological. The nature-nurture debate represents the philosophical conflict between those who hold that human behaviours are largely biological (and therefore fixed) and those who contend that it is the environment that is the chief influence on human behaviour (and, therefore, that human behaviour may be manipulated positively or negatively). Within psychology, the debate centres particularly around the areas of language, sex-role development, intelligence, personality, perception, mental illness and aggression.

Some commentators (eg. N. Hayes) see this debate as one purely between those of the forces of reaction and conservatism (represented by the nativists) and those of liberalism and social democracy (represented by the empiricists). But the example of Skinner (who, as an empiricist, shares with Locke and other extreme environmentalists the assumption of an innate 'tabula rasa' or 'blank slate' mind) suggests that this is an over-simplification. Nevertheless, though the 'nurture' approach may be deterministic, in the fields concerned it logically allows for greater possibility of conscious intervention than the biological approach which utilises the notion of an 'inevitable human nature'; environments are far easier to change than genes, after all.

It is in its social implications that the biological bias reveals itself as an implicit supporter of tradition and the status quo (i.e. hierarchy and inequality). Two political structures illustrate this: both patriarchy and feudalism were founded on notions of *ascribed status*; neither effort nor intelligence could change the social position which blood and biology had decreed a person should remain.

Today, the nature-nurture issue is especially relevant in education and social control. If, for example, one agrees with Hans Eysenck that



intelligence is determined solely by one's 'racial' inheritance, and that certain people are born with an unalterable predisposition to be legally deviant, then one may accept social stratification on 'racial' grounds, and medical solutions (eg. drug 'cures') to the social problem of crime. And if one concurs with Konrad Lorenz that people, like certain animals, are innately socially aggressive, then one may argue, as Hobbes did, that strict measures of social repression (and therefore a strong state) will inevitably be necessary. Another example is Francis Galton's theory of 'Eugenics' which advocates the maintenance of a 'superior race' by sterilising the lower classes who are said to weaken the human gene pool with their 'inferior' genes. This idea was part of the thinking behind the extermination programme of the Third Reich in Germany.

N. Hayes usefully points to the deliberate deceit in the evidence put forward by such nativist theories: Burt, for example, completely fabricated evidence to show that identical twins had identical IQs; other studies neglected to mention that 'separated' twins (with similar IQs) had been brought up in similar environments; IQ tests such as WAIS and WISC (upon which Eysenck bases his theories) have been demonstrated to be culturally biased; other researchers have doctored photographs and wilfully ignored contradictory data. Because many of these nativist arguments legitimise measures of social control, because they attempt to justify hierarchy, and because many of their supporters consistently ignore cogent criticisms, N. Hayes contends that they are little more than politics in disguise.

Turned on its head, however, the 'human nature' argument has also been used by those of us who recognise the existing order as largely unjust and iniquitous, and who describe it as a perversion of the 'natural order'. Marx, for example, argued that people are 'naturally' good, and it is only exploitative social relations of production that create evil in people. To what extent his ideas are economic reductionism is highly debatable, though it is likely they were not intended as such. Within Marxism there are many arguments over how far the infrastructure (economic base) shapes the superstructure (cultural features of a society). Empirical sociology suggest that ideas do frequently come about independently of the economic base, and that many social structures (such as stratification along ethnic or religious lines) develop irrelevant of the 'mode of production'. It is suggested, then, that the economic is only *one* factor, important though it may be. For example, professional status is a legal privilege which enables its holders to achieve considerable prestige and power. Economic determinism does not account for these middle classes who, by virtue of



their claim to expertise, operate self-regulating monopolies, a form of exploitation not unlike that of control of the forces of production.

The dialectic is what happens when something new is created out of the conflict of opposites. It is a deterministic principle in itself, and Marx's materialistic version of it has been heavily criticised; Max Stirner, for example, said it was 'merely the will of God restated in pseudo-secular terms'. Similarly, Albert Camus has attacked its use by Marxist revolutionaries to justify their political murders; they absolve themselves of responsibility by claiming that their acts are merely part of the 'inevitable process of history'.

Aside from any personal criticisms of Marx as a dogmatic thinker, the principles of dialectical materialism need not be quite as dogmatic as many of his disciples present them. I would argue that some of the reasons Marx gives as conducive to revolution, such as the emiseration of the working class and the formation of trade unions, are too deterministic (since these events may easily be interpreted and acted upon differently than the ways Marx implies). Yet his suggestion that the conscious efforts of a committed vanguard are necessary certainly recognises the role of free will in the revolutionary process; such individuals are not galvanised into revolt simply by the experience of increasing poverty, but through the conscious understanding that it is acts of will that are significant in the change, creation and maintenance of social systems, not just the 'process of history' or the 'way of things'. Critics have argued that developments in the twentieth century disprove the predictions of Marx; again this point is highly debatable, revolving as it does around the question of whether the middle classes are essentially proletarian and vice versa, and thus the definition of 'class'. Yet I would contend that Marx's analysis of the social structure of his own time is highly insightful, and still has some application today. Who would deny, for example, that technological change precedes social change? (Note the Spinning Jenny at the start of the industrial revolution, and the fact that the microchip and automation are now gradually creating a new 'class' of 'non-workers').

A trend in the modern Marxism has rejected economic determinism in preference for another type of determinism, even more 'close fitting'. This school of thought, initiated by A. Gramsci and developed by L. Althusser in the 1960s, holds that since concepts like 'ownership' and 'property' are legal terms, the superstructure must *precede* the infrastructure; major cultural institutions do not *reflect* economic relations; rather, it is their function to *create* the conditions favourable for the economic relations to exist. The bourgeoisie cannot rule by force alone, but must create a hegemony. Many of us would agree that this government, like others, tries to create an ideological smokescreen (eg.



in its use or non-use of words, its attempts to control the media and educational system, its emphasis on public relations and its economic relationship with major purveyors of entertainment); Althusser and others argue that the government is wholly successful in this and therefore that all consciousness is class-based and necessarily false. The logical concomitant of this pessimistic vision is that any kind of objective knowledge is impossible. This then begs the question as to how Althusser himself might come to such conclusions, since none of the information upon which he bases his theories can be valid.

More recently, this 'structural' Marxist approach has been expanded upon by Nicos Poulantzas. Poulantzas sees the state entirely in terms of the rest of the system; he rightly points out that capitalists are not a united force, but concludes that the function of the state is to mediate between these competing factions for the general interests of capitalism as a whole. To Poulantzas, the intention of individual personnel within a ruling party is irrelevant; it is the structure as a whole that matters. The state government is thus seen as the 'intelligence of the bourgeoisie'. This is particularly significant in the debate over such issues as the NHS and state benefits. According to Poulantzas, these measures may be opposed by certain factions within capitalism at the time; but the state instigates them because it realises that such institutions ultimately ensure capital accumulation; they are *entirely* in the interests of capitalism (eg. the dole is supposed to sustain a reserve army of labour ready for times of expansion), and have *not* come about as a response to working class or philanthropic demand.

Poulantzas' vision goes beyond the mechanistic approach of psychological determinism into the realms of teleology; every part of the social system is miraculously 'designed' to achieve complete control for the 'general purposes of capitalism', an entity greater than the individuals who comprise it. Poulantzas is pessimistic in that he describes a capitalist system that is so successful that there is no way out. Poulantzas' solution reveals him to be teleological ethically, too. His class theory defines only a relatively tiny minority as the 'true working class' (thus he differs from most anarchists and Marxists who believe that it is the *majority* who are oppressed); this fits neatly in with his belief in the need for a revolutionary party led by an *élite* consisting of people like Poulantzas himself who 'know best' (the majority being hopelessly mystified). This most pessimistic branch of Marxist theory then, in the final analysis, reveals itself as cynically *élitist* since if the oppressed do not have the sense to understand their predicament ruthless means are justified.

The essence of ideological determinism, whether it be capitalist, feudalist, patriarchal or representative of any other social theory which



seeks via scientific or philosophical arguments to justify hierarchical power structures and the oppression of the majority ('temporarily' or permanently) is that it emphasises the mechanistic approach to such an extent that it can find no place for free will. A deterministic ideology is any Weltanschauung claiming to be 'the whole picture' when evidence suggests that other factors are involved. Whether such views are held naively or with cynical intent is not always clear; the point is to understand their logical conclusions.

## Part II: Free Will as Ideology

The phenomenological approach to social science is a comparatively recent development. As a reaction against previous deterministic approaches, it has often gone so far that it is debatable whether it qualifies as a 'science' at all; with its stress on humanity's difference from animals, subjectivity and the primacy of free will, some believe it has more in common with art. Its value lies in its potential for *validity* rather than *reliability*; supporters claim that this former quality is lacking in the positivist approach which confines itself to that which is testable and verifiable. For example, if the same action can mean different things to different people, how can one draw deterministic conclusions as to the reasons for such behaviour in people generally? Observation, it is argued, is inadequate without the use of empathic understanding.

Again, though, if used exclusively such a perspective may be misleading. It is significant that this interpretive approach to sociology came to prominence particularly in the United States, a country which stresses 'the freedom of the individual'; for if a social structure (such as a class or institution) is nothing more than a series of 'interactions between individuals' then only these, rather than any statistically 'permanent' features of that structure are significant. Indeed, in the past, Americans have claimed that their country is class-free and that there exists instead only a 'continuous hierarchy' of individuals; this is similar to Margaret Thatcher's assertion that 'society does not exist'.

Purely interpretive sociologists have no concern for the wider historical or social setting; they fail to explain the *origin* of norms; *why* people frequently behave in certain ways in certain situations. Meanings used and acted upon may be systematically generated by the social structure; but the purely interpretive approach, by not offering any general theory, neglects this possibility.

In both its theory and method, purely interpretive sociology may fulfil an ideological function. In the study of 'social problems', for



example, phenomenologists might focus on an individual's experience of poverty, but fail to account for the general pattern and its fluctuations. And in the study of social deviance, their micro approach leads to participant observation studies of homosexual subcultures, for instance, instead of what many of us would regard as serious crimes that affect many people, such as exploitation and corporate swindles. By ignoring these, phenomenologists imply that they are not worthy of study; their whole approach is based on the idea that what should be examined is only what people are aware of (subjective impression); therefore factors which people are not aware of but which are real in their consequences (such as government policies) are overlooked. Thus the groups studied are the more accessible and superficially interesting ones, while those who have most to hide perhaps (eg. élites) are left to go about their business away from critical inspection.

In its preference for the small group over the social system as a whole, the interpretive approach to sociology often merges with social psychology. And though certain social scientists (such as G. H. Mead and E. Goffman) are both psychological and sociological, there are often important differences in practice. Social psychology is concerned with explaining general processes. Experiments are typically carried out on individuals regarded as representative of the population under study so that results may be applied to that population (and hopefully to humanity at large). Though many interpretive sociologists do attempt to make similar general statements (eg. ethnomethodologists assert that 'people select certain aspects of a situation to provide evidence for the existence of underlying patterns in the social world') they normally use these as assumptions upon which they base participant observation case studies, rather than statements to be tested in themselves. Such studies frequently concern contemporary, real-life situations (eg. observations of a coroner's office) and seek to emphasise the variety in human interpretations rather than the similarity.

A typical social psychological study, however, often through the creation of an artificial situation, attempts to make a general statement that will apply to any person in that situation, not simply 'these people in this role in this society'. (Thus conclusions are sometimes statements of the obvious, such as: 'people are more attracted to others through increased exposure to them'.) Where it fails in this, social psychology must expand its horizons and begin to make cultural comparisons. At the point of socialisation, the disciplines of psychology and sociology merge, each recognising that neither can provide the complete picture alone.

Unlike the interpretive approach to sociology, social psychology is not a perspective in itself; rather it is an area of psychology that may



utilise many different explanations for any one topic, including Behaviourist, psychoanalytic and other, less ambitious, theories, as well as various methods, ranging from the experiment to the interview. Since it aspires to be scientific, it is concerned specifically with the regular patterns of response people give to each other. It may often provide a useful antidote to an excessive (and perhaps ideological) emphasis on 'individual free choice', since its purpose is to provide evidence to show how people *generally* respond in a given situation.

Of particular interest here is the question of power. This fundamental issue divides the anarchist from the Marxist, and indeed any state socialist. An assumption behind 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', parliamentary socialism and all other attempts to achieve freedom and equality via a hierarchical power structure is that the individuals holding such positions will not find that, as the saying goes, 'power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'.

I would agree that it is rather naive to assert that all those seeking power do so for cynical ends (such as the mere accumulation of power itself, personal wealth and self-aggrandisement). Invariably there are many opportunists, megalomaniacs and 'professional politicians' in every society; but there must surely be a large number who believe that a position of power is the best way to help others. Most people generally reject the determinism implicit in much scientific psychology; they believe that they do indeed *choose* their actions, and that this principle applies irrespective of the situation; they believe that their personalities (and thus their consciousness and self-reflection) are *constant*. Social psychological studies of power and obedience have attempted to test this.

One of the earliest studies in this area (*The Authoritarian Personality* T. W. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswik et al, 1950) focussed on the role of socialisation. As one might expect, it concluded that certain child-rearing practices (such as conditional love and a hierarchical family structure) were conducive to the development of a highly 'authoritarian-aggressive, authoritarian-submissive' personality, typified by a morbid admiration for power and a dislike of outgroups. This finding, since it affects only a minority, is only supplementary to later studies, however, which suggest that, given the situation, the *majority* will behave 'uncharacteristically'.

In order to discover how far the 'ordinary person' would go when given orders, Stanley Milgram (1963) instructed subjects to administer (fake) electric shocks of increasing voltage each time a stooge answered questions incorrectly (or failed to answer) in a 'teaching' experiment. Subjects were not coerced or threatened; when they protested that the stooge (an actor) was obviously in pain, they were simply given



standardised responses, such as 'Please go on', and 'You have no choice'. Contrary to psychiatrists' predictions, 65% went as far as 450 volts, and many thought that they had killed the stooge.

Obedience is by definition linked to power; in a study exploring both polarities, Philip Zimbardo (1973) simulated a prison situation. Subjects were matched individuals: 'normal', law-abiding, middle class American students. All expressed a preference for playing the role of prisoners; lots were drawn to decide who should play which role. The study has not been widely replicated for ethical reasons; scheduled to last two weeks, it was abandoned after six days because the 'prisoners' were displaying neurotic symptoms such as depression and psychosomatic disorders; the normally mild-mannered people playing the guards had become increasingly brutal and sadistic; locked into their roles, they had played them to the full.

Zimbardo explains this result in terms of both the brutalising atmosphere, and the models of power and powerlessness we learn from childhood. Both his study and that of Milgram suggest that few are immune from the influence of the situation.

An interesting real-life study which adds further weight to this argument is that by Robert Michels in Germany. He asserts that organisations such as socialist parties and trade unions, whose very aim is democratic, themselves become undemocratic because of the hierarchical nature of their bureaucratic structure. The vested interests of the élite are inevitably substituted for the general wishes of the people; Michels terms this 'the Iron Law of Oligarchy'.

Freedom, as in 'freedom from external coercion or threat' is not quite the same thing as free will, which refers to the idea that one's actions are based on conscious self-reflection rather than simply automatic responses. The two concepts blur into one somewhat capitalist ideology, however, which derived largely from the industrial revolution, when the 'self-made men' of manufacturing industry argued for more political power. It followed that if *achieved* economic position was to replace *ascribed* status, then (feudal) collectivism must be supplanted by individualism. The capitalist class almost undermined their own claim to political power by this argument, since if birth was no longer to be considered the determiner of social and economic position, then *all* groups had a right to a share of power. Thus the Chartists, democracy itself and eventually the modern Labour movement all derived from the political ideals espoused by the early capitalists.

Early restrictions on the vote and the institution of property inheritance effectively protected the original capitalist class, however, and ensured a significant degree of social reproduction. Today the



examination system fulfils a similar function, favouring as it does the offspring of the better off. The concept of 'meritocracy' ('IQ + effort = social & economic position') is vital to capitalist ideology; even where politicians admit that it fails, they still claim that it is an ideal that policies are designed eventually to create.

In the nineteenth century, the ideology of the 'free' individual led to the blaming of those who were poor, ill and unemployed; they were regarded as 'responsible' for their own misfortune. This approach saw unemployment always as self-chosen (though the general fluctuations of the economy are always the major cause). Individualist social commentators put poverty down to 'moral inadequacy', laziness and fecklessness. Like today, many of the poor were actually in work, but their pay was simply appallingly low. In the last decade, this ideology has reappeared, along with the idea of using welfare services as a deterrent (i.e. by making the dole so unbearable that people are forced to accept low-paid jobs).

Related to this are notions of 'contracts'. The worker is said to 'freely sell his labour' to the employer. The employer (unlike the feudal lord) has no further obligations beyond the payment of the wage. This implies that the worker has *choice*, like a consumer in a shop. As Kit McMahan (Chairman of Midland Bank) said recently: 'If the commissar or the feudal lord tells you to work, you work; but when someone in a top hat tells you to work, you don't have to'. But when the alternative is poverty or starvation, is this really a choice? The worker does not 'freely' sell his labour; the contract is not an equal one. The person with nothing but his labour to sell does not have the free choice of the property owner, who may if s/he owns enough live off his or her capital.

The Thatcher administration makes generous use of the words 'freedom', 'responsibility' and 'choice'. 'Responsibility' refers to the fact that while the capitalist system and its representatives are happy to cause poverty to many through the pursuit of profit, it is up to those who are the victims of this to make the best they can of the result, despite *financial constraint*. 'Choice' refers to all those goods, services and opportunities on the market which the mechanism of the market itself ensures that people are *obliged* to take. 'Freedom' refers only to economic freedom; it follows that if one has little in the way of economic resources one has little freedom; in effect, the freedom Thatcher espouses is the freedom of the already-rich to pursue their economic interests still more vigorously. This 'freedom' means no more than *economic power*, which is therefore a *fixed sum*: more for some means less for others.

Free will becomes ideological when the concept is employed in such a



way that there is naive or wilful neglect of genuine structural constraints. It may be used by those who already have 'freedom' (power) who claim that 'we each achieve our position only through our own efforts, so we only have ourselves to praise or blame'. This ideological perspective is one which mistakenly asserts that all men are islands. But underlying the ideology of the 'free market' is a type of social Darwinism. 'Market forces' are reified, and economic trends instigated directly by government (such as the huge rises in unemployment and VAT in the early 1980s) are described as 'inevitable'; note, for example, Thatcher's claim that 'There is no alternative'.

The 'free market' economy, as espoused by Adam Smith and now Milton Friedman, is not *really* an appeal to free will, but a rationalisation for an 'evolutionary', 'natural' society where only the strongest survive. While New Right administrations emphasise the 'freedom of the individual' in their overt ideology, in their 'covert' ideology the vision is more pessimistic. What they most dislike is the idea that society should be manipulated (by governments) or rebuilt (by revolutionaries) to be based on the moral values of freedom and economic equality; this would go against what the New Right regard as the 'natural order'.

### Part III: Attempts at Synthesis

In balancing free will against determinism it may be useful to return to the principles of science upon which the empirical approach to determinism is based. Early science did not fully take on board the arguments of Hume, that nothing can be known for sure, except on the basis of *probability*. The idea has been restored to prominence, however, through Karl Popper's approach to the philosophy of science. It is argued that the past cannot be an entirely reliable basis for future predictions; 'general laws' of nature are therefore to be regarded instead as statements of probability. It is *likely* that external and internal structural constraints will cause certain behaviours, but it is quite *possible* that they will not.

This is related to the distinction between *contingency* and *necessity*. In empirical science, the occurrence of a future event is contingent upon an infinite number of other factors. But in maths, for example, 'events' occur by necessity; they logically follow one another. Some purely theoretical approaches to social phenomena (such as that of Poulantzas) since they are not concerned with empirically-derived statistical probabilities (i.e. determinism on the basis of contingency) see social



structures as no more than abstract things that behave in accordance with necessity (eg. the 'inevitable logic of capitalism').

This ultimate uncertainty of the real — as opposed to the theoretical — world applies to social science even more than to natural science; in the latter, predictions have always been far more accurate, but developments in physics this century add further weight to the arguments of those of us who baulk at explanations of human life solely in terms of laws. In his 'Uncertainty Principle', Heisenberg suggested the limits of what science can actually know. In pointing out, for example, that the light required to see certain particles affects the way they behave, Heisenberg is arguing that empirical deterministic science cannot provide all the answers because precise measurement is impossible.

Within social science, there seem to have been more efforts made to combine principles of free will and determinism in sociology than in psychology. Psychology, rooted as it is in physiology, is often loathe to abandon mechanistic models; it takes pride in calling itself a science. But many sociologists would rather abandon claims to be a science altogether than accept reductionism frequently implicit in scientific logic. They recognise that with such a vast and complex subject matter as human social life, it is necessary for social science to be artistic as well as scientific, to combine empathy with observation and theory.

I have outlined criticisms of the exclusively theoretical approach of some Marxists such as Althusser and Poulantzas. Yet it is within Marxism more than any other major sociological school that some of the more insightful approaches to bridging the gap between 'structure' and 'action' have come. These academic Marxists often combine a theoretical framework with interview or participant observation studies, and use these idiographic (small group) approaches to complement statistical studies of larger numbers. Such research (by Paul Willis in the field of education, and Clegg and Dunkerley on organisation, to name but two important examples) has led to the creation of a picture of human social life that 'rings true'. This balance of structural theory and phenomenology is not only more flexible; it is inevitably more valid, humanistic and optimistic.

In general psychology, it is now accepted by many that the nature-nurture debate referred to earlier is a false one. Even geneticists agree that, in practice, genotype (that which is fixed) and phenotype (the result of interaction between genotype and environment) cannot be separated. The genotype itself does not cause anything; human behaviour is the result of the interaction between the two. This point is illustrated by Hebb's Egg Analogy; take the genotype away from a developing egg and there is no egg; take the environment away and the



egg goes cold and dies. Acceptance of this makes 'nativist' arguments appear still more ideological.

Psychoanalysis is not the only major psychological theory that attempts to be 'interactionist' or 'dialectical' in this sense. It focusses on the way the environment (chiefly significant others) helps shape and modify innate unconscious forces (libido). Thus all behaviour (basically goal-directed) is seen as a compromise between the need for relief and the requirements of reality and conscience. With the concept of a psychological defence mechanism, psychoanalysis seems to have quashed the free will - determinism debate altogether. I might believe, for example, that I have chosen a certain action for aesthetic, ethical or ambitious reasons; in fact my action was merely the unconscious sublimation of libido, and my conscious reason a rationalisation. But though classical theory neglects consciousness as an independent agent, analysts recognise its role in practice.

Many neo-Freudians have gone further, however. Existential analysis and humanistic psychology transpose the whole framework of psychoanalysis into phenomenological terms. The classical model, they argue, with its mechanistic emphasis, depicts human beings as fuel-driven robots. Though it is doubtful whether Freud would accept some of these radical alterations as still recognisably psychoanalytic, ontologists such as R. D. Laing and A. Maslow still regard themselves as Freudians, and secessionists such as Fritz Perls and Eric Berne might even be accused of plagiarism in that their 'new' theories are largely restatements of psychoanalysis in a different language.

It is significant that psychoanalysis has been appreciatively received by many anarchists and Marxists as well as by existentialists. While suggesting that early social contact rather than genetics is the main agency shaping the personality (Freud argued that the innate drives are basically shapeless rather than instinctual urges towards certain specific behaviours) it offers the possibility of change through conscious insight. I would suggest that the principles of psychoanalytic therapy itself illustrate an important qualification to the doctrine of psychic determinism; the release of fixated libido is by no means an automatic process that an analyst 'does' to a passive client. As well as having the conscious desire to change, the client, in 'turning id into ego', must feel what s/he understands, and understand what s/he feels. The classical psychoanalytic equation (insight + catharsis = change) is one which includes the important element of conscious understanding, then; existentialists would add 'choice' to this formula, emphasising the fact that even if a person has understood him or herself they may still decide not to give up self-destructive habits. But the principle is the same in practice.



Anarchism and Marxism, unlike existentialism, are not just attitudes to life, but political philosophies. In advocating certain forms of social organisation, they necessarily imply that the current system is inherently flawed. It follows that those of us optimistic enough to believe that the present state of affairs (and variations within it) is not inevitable, must find effective methods to bring about change. The bludgeoning of opponents has not only been questioned on moral grounds, but has been ineffective. Its futility seems even more obvious today when state and capitalist science has been zealously applied to the armaments industry.

How effective the spread of revolutionary social ideas has been in the past is a point for empirical research. An analogy with psychoanalysis suggests its potential, however; as Erich Fromm says, the truth can liberate.

Revolutionaries of the past emphasised deterministic arguments. Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin maintained that man (sic) was 'naturally sociable'. L. Susan Brown (*The Raven* 5, June 1988) has usefully pointed to the fact that such assertions imply logical contradictions, since the creation of a state and its concomitant repressive forces means that humanity has somehow 'gone against its own nature'. I would argue, like she does, that 'human nature' is simply whatever people do, whatever is physically possible, and this has so far been anything from exploitation and murder to altruism and anarchism.

Of course, the revolutionaries of the past recognised free will (Bakunin says, for example, that 'Liberty, morality and the human dignity of man consist precisely in this, that he does good, not because it is commanded, but because he *conceives* it, *wills* it and loves it') but they emphasised its opposite. An important problem is that their opponents also used such arguments (eg. 'man is naturally wicked'); and since newspapers have always given more coverage to acts of violence than acts of kindness, the reactionaries seemed to be supported by the evidence.

L. Susan Brown suggests that existentialism provides a far better basis for an anarchist argument, since it implies free will and thus possibility. I would accept this, but would add that the influence of the social situation is another factor that can often be usefully emphasised (both negatively and positively; Proudhon, for example, is reputed to have said 'Freedom is the mother of order, not the daughter'). This is not to assert deterministically (and naively) that 'anarchism is the panacea', but that, though we can be our own cause, self-concept (and thus intention) is partly a product of the reactions of others.

Returning to the psychoanalytic analogy, the phrase 'feeling what



you understand' suggests that intellectual comprehension may not be enough alone for change of attitude and action. Note for example the changed attitudes of many miners' wives after the *experience* of the 1984-5 pit strike; not only did they become more militantly opposed to Thatcherism; many also refused to return to the old role of relative subservience to their husbands when the strike was over.

The art of successful propaganda would appear to be to arrive at the right time and place with the right message. Preceding remarks on ideology suggest that *counter-propaganda* must also be a vital element. Two popular misconceptions that must certainly be dispelled are the ideas that people are 'naturally' wicked, and that power must inevitably be distributed hierarchically. Though basically erroneous, such notions are real in their consequences.

#### Part IV: Morality and Dogma

Morality is a doctrine or set of principles distinguishing right from wrong. The idea of morality and thus the law of every state necessarily enshrines a belief in free will because unless (physically or mentally) unable to distinguish right from wrong, people are held responsible for their actions, and blamed or praised accordingly. The purpose of law, then, is to *limit* conscious choice (with threats of punishment). Intellectual dogma can fulfil a similar function, circumscribing as it does that which 'can be'. In Feudal society, religious dogma in the form of preaching as well as legal sanction was used to try to prevent social change. That societies often *do* change demonstrates that those who try to manipulate people with dogma cannot fool all the people all the time. Nevertheless, dogmatic arguments advocating the primacy of 'fate' or 'god's will' (such as Hegel's 'what is, is rational') have always been a force to be reckoned with. In claiming to be an 'absolute truth', dogma has the potential to make humanity subordinate to a mere idea; to restrain all thought and action. The official interpreters of the 'holy law', the keepers of this 'sacred truth' are often those with most to lose politically and economically if it is rejected.

Where the state has become secular, law has increasingly come to be recognised simply as a product of its milieu, and therefore of human rather than divine invention. This being the case, there is no particular reason why law should reflect what many of us would regard as genuinely morality. It may simply be political expediency and the preservation of economic privilege disguised as 'the public good'. States who profess to support the principle of the sanctity of life actively promote murder and suffering, not least through war. Even in



'peacetime' examples of double standards proliferate; theft is not absolutely wrong in any state, not least in those which prosecute burglars and yet encourage some to profit from the work of others, accruing increasingly huge amounts of wealth in the form of property. Not only do capitalists and property managers steal the fruits of the worker's labour, they also steal from him or her access to the *means* of life and labour. The more property that comes under the control of a minority, the more the majority are at their mercy.

If the state's law is too partial to be a reliable moral standard, then we must seek other sources. The cognitive-developmental psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg describes moral understanding as a process that might extend into late adulthood. The highest stage entails action based upon self-chosen ethical principles rather than society's laws or public opinion. Kohlberg believes this final stage to be uncommon, though there must be many people who have rejected much if not all of society's law in favour of principles they believe to be more just.

In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Jurgen Habermas argues that there are three forms of knowledge: positivist, interpretive and self-reflective. Self-reflection involves going beyond what is given to the senses; criticisms can be made based upon actual 'ideal' objective standards. Without the existence of such standards, what would be the meaning of such words as 'exploitation' and 'cruelty'? According to Habermas, the basis of this standard of objective criticism is man's awareness of truth; this comes from within himself rather than from society or elsewhere.

The view of those who believe in the existence of god, however, is that the higher level of consciousness necessary for us to conceive of 'oughtness' must derive from a prime mover. The differing actual moralities throughout the world are explained by the fact that we each have varying degrees of insight into the objective, obligatory standard which god has designed.

In his later years, Dostoyevski contended that the church offered the only hope for human society. His great intellect frequently balked at accepting the existence of god; yet because of his characteristic pessimism (he believed that people are 'naturally vicious') atheism meant despair and disorder, since then there could be no moral convictions ('everything is permitted'). *Crime and Punishment* explores the possibility of a person proposing that for those destined for greatness, all morality is simply useless dogma and law a hindrance. The idea of morality may therefore be brushed aside to make way for greatness, and murder permitted. In *Crime and Punishment*, the brilliant but impoverished student murders the evil, useless old moneylender so that he may afford to continue his studies. To



Dostoyevski, a secular society meant a society of men rationalising their own viciousness with such utilitarian excuses. The purpose of religious dogma, then, is to lay down 'moral absolutes' to prevent *everyone* playing god in this manner. A former revolutionary himself, Dostoyevski finally condemned socialists and anarchists for trying to create 'heaven on earth'. His own ideal was for the state of Russia to be replaced by a huge monastery; he believed salvation could only come through suffering. Religion therefore fulfilled two personal functions for Dostoyevski; not only did it provide him, a man frightened by his own 'natural viciousness', with firm boundaries; in its hair-shirt variety it also satisfied his guilt-ridden need to be punished.

The earliest exponent of what is now called existentialism seems to have suffered fewer intellectual qualms. Kierkegaard's belief in god was a deliberate 'leap into the unknown'. Such leaps are necessary, he says, because life is short, and endless reasoning and objectivity can be mere 'escape into thought', observing life instead of living. This highlights what philosophers see as the main problem with existentialism; that it is subjective to the point of being uncommunicable. Yet for Kierkegaard, whose views have influenced Protestantism (which is much more individualistic than Catholicism, for example) the advantage is that it means a 'Christianity without dogma'.

At the other extreme, Nietzsche's philosophy exemplifies existentialism as the attitude of the rebel. In a similar way, Max Stirner's egoism is a rejection of everything that might constrain the individual, including ideas of church, state, morality and society itself: to him, all are dogma. Interestingly, Stirner translated the work of Adam Smith (pioneer of what is now known as free market capitalism), and it has been observed more than once that Stirner's ideas of self-interest and individualism seem closer to modern day Thatcherite ideology than to the anarchists he is usually categorised with.

Existentialism, with its emphasis on subjective experience and free will, appears to be compatible with a variety of Weltanschauungs and ideologies, and is in itself antagonistic only to the essentialism of purely deterministic social science. But on the question of morality it seems to raise the perennial question: what is freedom — individualism or socialism?

Max Stirner, like much of Nietzsche, may be read either as a political or as a purely abstract philosopher. *The Ego and its Own* refers chiefly to an 'experience of spirit', an extreme form of phenomenology (subjective experience). It is the 'spiritual rebel' in Stirner that appeals to us perhaps more than the social theorist. The same holds for Nietzsche. His analysis of human possibility is something that can be appreciated irrelevant of his social prejudices.



Nevertheless, such 'idealistic' or 'romantic' individualistic philosophies have frequently been linked to 'might is right' ideologies such as capitalism and dictatorships. This was the dilemma faced by Albert Camus. He was able to accept with equanimity that god does not exist, and that morality is relative; in his younger days, he embraced wholeheartedly this new nihilism, and in true existentialist fashion advocated living each moment to the full. Thus in *A Happy Death*, Camus's murderer does not get convicted or suffer guilt and repentance, but spends his money cheerfully.

But the experiences of the Second World War seriously tempered Camus's nihilism. He clearly recognised that no one is an island, for in this situation moral choices and practical decisions meant life or death to others, often his friends. In joining the French resistance, he took sides in the moral argument. Camus did not abandon his nihilism altogether, only the extreme form that if taken literally logically justifies 'hardness', ruthlessness and national self-aggrandisement.

In fact, existentialism can itself be integral in a humanistic approach to society. Thus Miguel de Unamuno claims that 'uncertainty, doubt, perpetual wrestling with the mystery of our fatal destiny, mental despair and the lack of any solid, stable, dogmatic foundation may be the basis of an ethic'. Camus himself continued to accept the relativity of values, but contended that the very concept of the 'absurd' (anything that thwarts our desire for value and meaning) implies a standard of coherence, which must be of human origin; it is only by reference to *others* that we have value and meaning. Thus a 'freedom' that restrains others, by physical or economic force, is self-defeating.

Indeed, the 'freedom' postulated by the individualist cannot possibly exist in reality when others are not free; Simone de Beauvoir said: 'It is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom'. It is the ideological defining of 'freedom' simply as (social and economic) power that asserts otherwise. As Bakunin said: 'No man can achieve his own emancipation without at the same time working for the emancipation of all men around him. My freedom is the freedom of all since I am not truly free in thought and in fact, except when my freedom and my rights are approved in the freedom and rights of all men who are my equals.' Each of us cannot achieve freedom without others, and vice versa. Again, we can be islands in our *thoughts* but not in our *actions*. It might be dogmatic to assert that all killing of human beings is fundamentally wrong. But if human beings themselves are to remain more important than the ideas they have created, ends and means must be in harmony, and every person an end in his or herself.



### Epilogue: A Current Controversy

Arguments about whether we are caused or cause ourselves are pertinent to certain debates within the Left in general, notably over the Welfare State. The Conservative government have used arguments of 'choice' and 'responsibility' as the pretext for the running down of the NHS, and for cuts in benefits for the poorer sections. The controversy for us is whether we are justified in arguing for the continued existence of a Welfare State which:

- a* has been shown to benefit the middle classes more than the poor and working classes
- b* has in many cases been designed purely for the benefit of the capitalist class; in the nineteenth century, for example, British industrialists saw welfare as a means of competing with Germany whose welfare system was then more advanced (healthy workers produce more)
- c* has often been instigated in an effort to quieten working class discontent (eg. in the light of the Russian Revolution)
- d* we are legally forced to pay for through an increasingly regressive taxation system (i.e. the poor pay relatively more)
- e* is often degrading, inefficient and authoritarian.

Like the related issues of the Labour Party and the EEC, the question of measures which in some respects modify the market, might usefully be analysed on two levels: those of present possibilities and ultimate goals.

To argue, for example, that the existence of state welfare *necessarily* blunts revolutionary consciousness is simplistically deterministic. If certain elements of the Welfare State were abolished tomorrow, many people with few economic resources might well simply starve to death. Or they might become apathetic and self-destructive. Or they might break into shops and fight with police. Or they may demand other short-term aid.

I would contend that short-term measures such as Welfare States do not necessarily prevent our long-term aim of abolishing the state, just as 'liberal'/social democratic reforms aren't necessarily linear; people can consciously underdevelop their own societies (as in Cambodia) or push change in a completely different direction than that suggested by economics (as in Iran).

To argue, then, that accepting services from the state is necessarily (on principle) wrong, is *dogmatic* since it is based on simplistic assumptions. In the same way, the contention that 'all governments are equally bad' may have had some validity in the 1950s and 1960s when



there existed the 'consensus'; but now it is a bland assertion that ignores the catalogue of iniquities perpetrated by the present administration.

I conclude, then, that the marginal modifications to our present situation achieved through the state structure do not in themselves necessarily help *prevent* any more than they *create* the freedom we want. To assert otherwise is to ignore human intention in a deterministic and dogmatic manner.

*Keith Flett*

## **The Future (and Past), of Anarcho-Communism: a comment**

I am not an anarchist, but a Trotskyist, although not of the official variety! But in my capacity as a left historian I'm very much in favour of a free flow of ideas, and have found a consistent interest in some of the articles which have appeared in *The Raven*.

Some of the comments in your Editorial, No. 9, and Laslo Sekelj's article 'Has Anarcho-Communism a future?' have finally provoked me into a brief response.

Firstly I would suggest that the historical articles which have appeared have been one of the main strengths of the *The Raven*. They have often explored areas and people which are ignored for reasons of the condescension of posterity,<sup>1</sup> elsewhere. Secondly, I agree that the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe does suggest the need for a relook at the old debates between anarchists and Marxists. Which way forward, if you like.

It is within this context that I come to Sekelj's article. My key point being that before deciding if anarcho-communism has a future it would do no harm to determine what the idea currently stands for. In other words what is the past of anarcho-communism? Sekelj does touch on this question, but not in a particularly satisfactory manner.

Since this really is a brief comment I propose to confine myself to the question of the debate between anarchists and marxists in mid and late Victorian London, say 1860-90. There are already two books which

1. The phrase is E. P. Thompson's



cover this area, Stan Shipley's *Club Life and Socialism* and Hermia Oliver's *The International Anarchist Movement in late Victorian London*.<sup>2</sup>

As Sekelj notes "Anarchism belongs to the family of socialist doctrines": anarcho-communism at any rate. After the collapse of Chartism in 1858 there was a period of perhaps 20 years when ideas and movements of the left were confined to the margins of politics and where there was little clear distinction between tendencies which later came to identify themselves as socialist, anarchist and communist. The central point is that until the growth of the SDF/Socialist League and the ILP the hegemony of radical liberalism over even the most extreme margins, (I refer of course to Dan Chatterton) was almost total.<sup>3</sup> Such a point is largely missed by both Shipley and Oliver who focus exclusively on sectarian and small group politics. It is none the less of overriding importance.

As Sekelj points out, anarchists, at least in theory, "reject the very concept of the State". In the period after 1860 when, through the Liberal connection, many other radicals were looking to the State to provide reform from above or to pressuring it to deliver such reform from below, this should have marked out anarchism as a very distinctive theory indeed. Of course it did not. There was a strong anti-Statist element amongst the working class, shown, for example, in opposition to vaccination and the education provided by School Boards after 1870.<sup>4</sup> This opposition, as we might expect, was based on a practical dislike of State interference rather than a theoretical grasp of the role of the State. Joseph Lane's *Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto*, which Sekelj unaccountably ignores, probably straddles both theoretical and practical positions.

But and it is a very big but, those who did have a fully worked out position of opposition to the State, what Shipley calls 'natural extremists', like Frank Kitz and the Murrays, were also to be found calling for, and moving in, radical circles which supported the most extreme demand of the day, the nationalisation of the land.<sup>5</sup>

The fledgling anarchist tradition in this period, 1870/80, is well described in this report of a meeting which appeared in *The National Reformer* for early 1880: "Manhood Suffrage League, Mr. Jones reviewed the writings of Bronterre O'Brien and Josiah Warren and

2. Stan Shipley *Club Life and Socialism in Mid-Victorian London*, 1971; Hermia Oliver *The international anarchist movement in late Victorian London*, 1983.

3. Chatterton published *Chatterton's Commune* preserved in the British Library and printed on what we, today, would call toilet paper.

4. See *The Cooperator* for 1870/1. Logie Barrow is also researching this area.

5. *The National Reformer* January 18th 1880.



others and advocates Communism against the sovereignty of the individual". The difficulty is that, at least in the case of Bronterre O'Brien, the Social Democratic Federation and the proto-Marxist tradition had as much claim on his ideas as the anarchists. Thus we find in the split off from the SDF, the Socialist League, squabbles and faction fights between Marxists and anarcho-communists, in which William Morris was a key figure.

Both groups came from the same background of radical club politics, artisanal production, of extreme positions defined in two ways. Opposition to the individualism of secularism and a desire to go further than radical liberalism.

The battles which Marx had on the 1st International, although certainly having their adherents on both sides in this country did not because of the power of liberal hegemony have a lasting impact. The issue which split the Socialist League more than any other was Parliamentaryism, which was also a significant factor in the formation of the Communist Party in 1920 and in part, the inspiration for Lenin's 'Left Wing Communism'. The decisive split between anarchists and Marxists came from international disputes within the 2nd International in the 1890s rather than being self generated. Indeed there is a powerful sense in which the revolutionary syndicalists of 1910/11 were closer to revolutionary Marxism than the official and mechanistic Marxists of the SDF.

Much of this remains still to be unravelled. The future of anarcho-communism, if it has one, must surely lie in a better understanding of this past. The collapse of Stalinism means that, at long last, the task can be begun. A good place to start would be with a rereading of Marx's *Civil War in France*, based on the Paris Commune, to see what he really had to say about the State. As opposed to what Stalinism caused it to mean. And a rereading of William Morris's vision of a socialist future *News From Nowhere* which was first published 100 years ago this year.



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